Captain Landon

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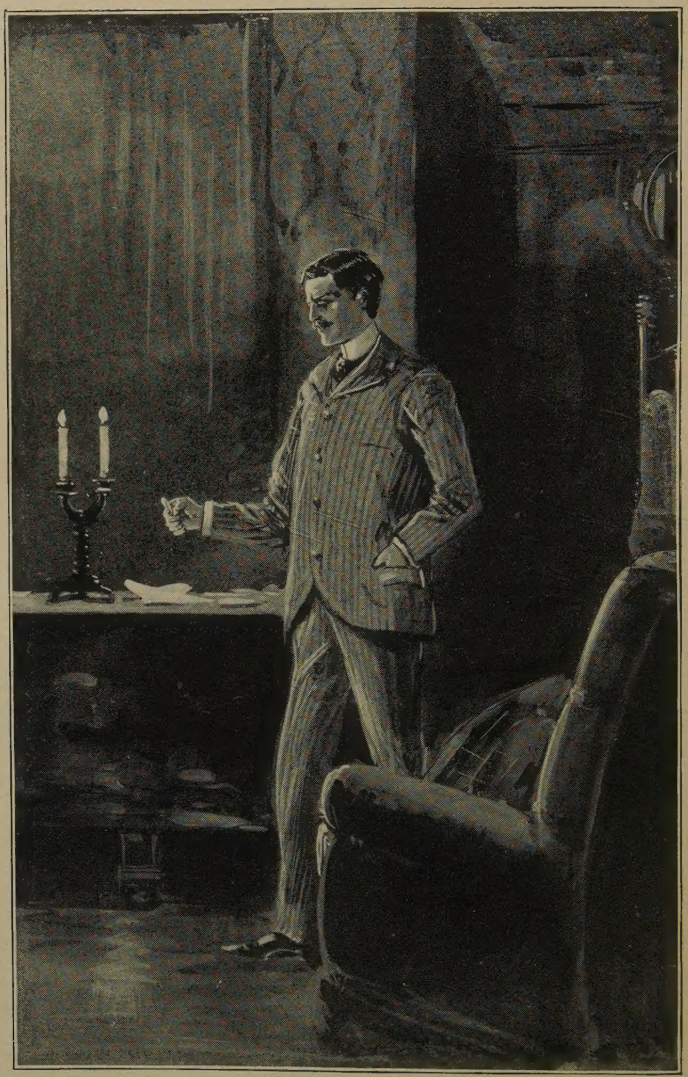
By RICHARD HENRY SAVAGE



"HEADS—ARMY! TAILS, I STAY HERE!"—*Page 32.*

CAPTAIN LANDON

A Story of Modern Rome

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"MY OFFICIAL WIFE," "CHECKED THROUGH," ETC.

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Book I
A WAITING GAME

CAPTAIN LANDON.

BOOK I.

A WAITING GAME.

CHAPTER I.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME.

The stuffy little Italian railway train slackened, after skirting the Sabine and Alban mountains, and, when it halted at the bridge over the diminutive Arno, Frank Hatton wearily raised his head as the guard, with a suggestive snap of his fingers, cried "Ecco la!"

There, before him, to the right, the dome of St. Peter's rose sharply cut against lean brown hill and pale green sky. It was their world goal. And, the realization seemed, after all, so prosaic.

"All roads lead to Rome," cheerfully murmured Hatton, as he roused his tired companion. "Boots and Saddles!" he cried, with a civilian's vague misuse of military jargon.

"If there is any other road," muttered Captain Sidney Landon, "I will patronize it, on my next visit!"

"So, you were not asleep?" queried Hatton.

"I have just discovered, by slipping on my thinking cap, Frank," remarked the Captain, "that I have only a faint idea of my official responsibilities as Vice Consul General to be, of the United States of America."

"Leave all that for the future," replied his traveling companion. "I fancy that you will have little to do but draw your salary! In words of the present, we have lodgings to select,—the inner man to provide for,—and we must cogitate, for we will be there in half an hour! Here is a sight for you!"

"Pshaw!" muttered the soldier. "I've seen the Grand Canyon of the Colorado and the Yosemite. It is a bit strange, however, that we two soldiers of fortune should not know a single soul in a city of three hundred thousand. And we are so fitly prepared for the greatness about to be thrust upon us. My West Point French and border Spanish is but slimly reinforced here with your vast stores of guttural German. We are outside barbarians."

"First class passengers in a second class compartment," cheerily rejoined Hatton. "After all, our 'bumblezug' from Florence is better than footing it like the old invaders. We have seen Thrasimene's storied shores, frowning Orvieto, Soractes' storied steep, and Mentana's bloody slopes with the purple Apennines for a background. In the old days, I would have carried a spear as a humble soldier under Brennus, 'larding the lean earth,' while you, appropriately ranked, would have ridden a snow white charger and gone on glittering in cuirass and golden greaves!"

"There, away you soar, in your literary balloon, Frank," cried the Captain, gathering up his little belongings. "My laurels were all won in a buckskin jacket on the hurricane deck of a wild west broncho.

"I've seen but little of the pomp and glory of war," he sighed—"but,—I've felt the sharp snap of the enemy's lead,—'to the Queen's taste!'

"Let us be prosaic! We must make a first camp somewhere! Besides, tho' used to tortillas and broiled 'jerky,'—I am in a revolt against the dark little birds,—the things that crawled, and all the mystery of our railway cuisine!"

The two young Americans descended to be pounced upon, at once, by a horde of drivers of "botti" and "citadine."

"This chap seems the least vociferous and uncivil! Let's take him! This is the Holy City. 'Ogniuno per se, e Dio per tutti!' "

The soldier revolted at the touch of the screaming drivers and drew back his stately head as the coarse peasants snapped their fingers under his nose with inviting clicks.

So, it fell out, that the gilt banded cap of the head porter of the Hotel de Russie was doffed, a little unwillingly, as the young pilgrims strode, half an hour later, into the cool entrance of the aristocratic resort.

The shades of night already invited rest, and the white stars sparkled like diamonds over the dusky ilex shades under the Pincian when the friends counted up all the disjecta membra of their luggage rescued from the Fra Diavolos of the customs and the Robert Macaires of the Universal Brotherhood of Insolent Railway Porters.

The curious throng of English aristocrats, Russian nobles and visiting cognoscenti stared passively at the tired travelers when they were ush-

ered into their cosy apartment au premier. "We have made our debut in style, and so, we can soon disappear in the interests of a prudent economy, Frank," laughed Landon, as they sat down to a raffinè little supper.

It was an hour later and the cigars were lit, when the Captain called up the programme of action.

"Of course—there's a stroll on the Corso, before turning in, but, before us lies the morrow, laden with the stern realities of life. I have only my chief to interview, and to explain the leisurely process of four months lost in arriving at my station, via Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, the Low Countries, Paris, Switzerland and Lombardy."

"You certainly have fulfilled the State Department's kindly injunction 'not to hurry in reporting,' and their courteous permission 'to take the most circuitous route,'" admiringly remarked Hatton, gazing at the strangely moody face of the young soldier.

"I always try to obey orders," placidly rejoined Landon.

"And, now, I suppose that you will hurl your-

self into your new duties, with a vengeance," continued the journalist.

"I will let the work come to me, Frank," remarked Landon, strolling to the window and gazing out at the unanswering stars. "My dear old chief, General George Thomas, told me never to volunteer! 'There's always work enough waiting to be put up against you,' said the dear old 'Slow Trot.'"

The young official tossed his cigar away with a sigh.

"If there was only some good stiff fighting now, —over here," the soldier impatiently murmured. "Let us go down—I have to find out where the lordly Consolate Generale degli State Uniti di America is housed! Somewhere, I believe, around the Piazzi di Spagna."

"There is where stout Cæsar Borgia hewed the head off a bull with a single blow," murmured Hatton.

"Don't believe a word of it, any more than the letters you will write from the Eternal City to your somnolent Philadelphian newspaper," answered Landon, with a touch of sarcasm.

"By the way, all I know is my chief's name and

the rumor that he has a thoroughly charming wife,—a subtle spirit of fire and flame. You, at least, have a distant hold upon your unknown employer, Mr. Rawdon Clark, and I believe a far-stretched cousinship with some artist here. Let us go down and find these addresses out.

"A pretty Rome we will see—yours the dim reflections of journalistic skimming,—mine, the 'demnition grind' of an unimportant office. The Rome of the modern newspaper—the Rome of the brand new American Consular circle. We will see no lances glittering on these hoary hills, no flaming signs in the skies. The days of miracles are over! Vogue la galère!"

Hatton eyed his companion curiously. "I wonder at your lack of interest in life, Landon. A Captain at twenty-seven,—you have already made a distinguished record;—the official way has been made smooth for you by all sorts of concessions, in fact, on the steamer, it was hinted to me that you would soon displace your chief, while I must rack my brains to send two letters a week 'chronicling the doings of distinguished Americans'—or, else—lose my local habitation and a name—that of a poor foreign correspondent."

Landon had halted in the doorway. "See here, Hatton," he sharply said, "you'll do me a favor to contradict any such nonsense. I come to bring peace—not a sword! My army career is closed forever,—and,—I care nothing for the officious friends behind me who would push me on unfairly."

He ceased abruptly, as he noted Hatton's look of surprise. "Tell me, rather, something of this meteoric capitalist, Clark!"

"I will have to wait," slowly answered Hatton, "until the Brandons can enlighten me. Robert Brandon and I are linked by some attenuated kinship, tho' I've never met him; but I'm told that Myra Brandon has well earned her title of 'The Encyclopedia,' by her fifteen years' residence in Rome.

"As Brandon vibrates from his studio here to the Schuylkill, he is au fait with all Philadelphian gossip.

"When I left Rutgers College and entered on the dismal drudgery of a law office, it was Edgar Styles of the Mail who first encouraged my feeble attempts at the belles lettres.

"He, God bless him, had already arranged for

this three years' European tour of mine when Clark bought in a controlling interest and fortunately saved the venerable 'Philadelphia Mail' from ruin.

"It was a case of outside speculative, general bonhomie and too much enterprise, with Styles.

"All I know of Rawdon Clark is that he has accumulated a huge fortune by meteoric operations in the far west,—that he is a man of uncontrollable vigor and push, and, that, boomerang like, he is attacking our staid Philadelphian society from the uttermost curves of a long European tour. He is both parvenu and masterful man!"

The chance-met companions were strolling along the narrow sidewalks of the Corso, when Landon, with piqued curiosity, returned to the subject of Hatton's strange employer. "Is this Clark a self-made man, a product of the wild west?" he demanded.

They had tired of the mixed multitude, the tawdry shop windows, the deafening cries of "Ecco il Fanfulla,—ecco la Capitale," and had sought for a quiet refuge in a wine cellar, the resort of a motley crowd of students, officers and tourists.

"No one seems to know of his antecedents," gravely replied Hatton. "He appeared suddenly in Philadelphia, staggering the town with the magnitude of his many investments. It was rumored that he intended to erect unto himself a palace, like the fabled Kublai Khan who did 'a stately pleasure dome decree.'

"It is further said that a preliminary club blackballing caused him to cut over here, and to swear that he would re-enter our home society as a victor, for the little bird whispers that the doors of swelldom at home were closed upon him, until he can prove title."

"We can't all be born Biddles," laughed Landon.

"Well, I will soon size him up," murmured Hatton. "I have a sheaf of letters to artists, resident Americans and our past journalistic connections. I am told that Mrs. Myra Brandon's salon is his great coign of vantage, for he's a liberal purchaser of Brandon's pictures."

"A sure way to reach the heart of an artist's wife, be he ever so successful," retorted Landon.

"Moreover, he must be a sly dog," continued Hatton, "for he is forming a collection of objets

d'art and allows Madame Myra to generously select for him."

"Then he is a sure winner," smiled Landon, "for pleasure and percentages go hand in hand, here in Rome, I am told."

The entrance of a half dozen young fellows who had been companions of the deck-tramping on the Aurania a few weeks before, soon made up a moving circle, augmented by the flower girls, ciceroni and all the mysteriously evolved touts who follow up the callow American abroad.

While Hatton, note book in hand, was already busied in gleaning local items for their joint Committee of Ways and Means,—Sidney Landon, with his head buried in his hands, listened to the ringing notes of a body of passing student singers.

In vain did Giuletta, the veriest witch of the flower girls, toss the red and white Roman roses in his lap. He saw not her smiling eyes, though he absently threw her a coin which made her murmur "Ecco un cavaliere!"

The young soldier's thoughts were far away in a stormy and a shadowed past. The long-necked wine flasks went round all unheeded, as he ran

down the strange life-current of the seven years of his frontier fighting experience.

Tall and graceful, with dark earnest eyes, Sidney Landon, at twenty-seven, was a proper squire of dames. But there were deep lines of care on his brow, showing white above the sun-burned tints of the Apache land, and a strong curve of repression in the stern lips, under the darkly sweeping cavalry mustache.

"Nice looking fellow, Landon," said Grimes of the New York Herald, to Hatton, as they lingered in a far corner, where the newcomer had dragged his senior to gather points upon "bachelor housekeeping" in Rome.

"Soldierly looking chap, too,—but,—there's something gone out of his life! I wonder if he had any trouble in the army," mused Grimes, always an agnostic by habit.

"Nonsense," retorted Hatton. "Old General Rufus Hatcher, who came over with us, told me that he was one of the most promising young cavalrymen in the army. He has been desperately wounded and three times mentioned for conspicuous gallantry in action."

"And, yet, there are flaws even in diamonds," mused Grimes.

"These West Pointers are about the last of the sentimentalists."

"All I know is what Hatcher told me," stubbornly rejoined the loyal Hatton, "and, you may be sure, when Colonel Miles Atwater of the 'Grays' made him Regimental Adjutant, after only three years of service,—that he is a simon pure."

"All right," good humoredly nodded Grimes, "I'll take your friend into our coterie, at your estimate."

The free lance of the Herald had already turned forty and he had seen "a deal of life,—its varnish and veneer,—the stucco fronts of character, flake off and disappear."

He was the doyen of the Roman American literary cult, and, so, presided over an informal club at a miraculously discovered old dwelling on the Corso, happily unknown to the Philistine of the baser sort.

It was a very haven of rest to the flower of the transplanted American colony, and Grimes ruled it with a rod of iron and much circumspection.

The elder man nodded his assent as they moved back to Sidney Landon's table. Grimes gazed kindly on Frank Hatton's beaming face. There was something inspiring in the genial face of old Rutger's favorite son.

At thirty, Hatton's boyish faith still shone out unbroken in his honest blue eyes.

The upright solidity of his plump, robust figure was set off by his merry, honest face, still smooth shaven, a deference to his jilted first love,—the law,—and finished by the frank smile of his fresh lips and the unruffled composure of his manly countenance.

"Hatton is an acquisition,—one in whom there is no guile," murmured Grimes, recalling the Three Star introductions of the new champion of the Philadelphia Mail—"but, if I mistake not, our dark-eyed, handsome soldier is like the 'woman with a past,'—he is a man with a story!"

Grimes was vaguely wondering if he would ever find it out, when Hatton had already plunged "in media res."

"Such a lucky chance,—Landon. To be settled at once, and, in the heart of the best region"—enthusiastically ran on Hatton, "and,—there's a bit

of deserted garden,—a ruined fountain,—the diamond water pouring from an old lion's head,—a glimpse of waving olive trees, and even a patch of visible blue sky."

When the ardent journalist had finished his catalogue, Grimes' grave voice broke in with a word of solemn warning:

"You are not a society man, Captain? If you are, I should deem it my duty to—"

"I am alone in the world," rejoined Landon, "and I have only come to Rome to get away from that peopled loneliness called society."

"You will never be lonely again," grimly replied Grimes. "We are a companionable sort, but our fortress on the Corso is an Eveless Paradise. You will find 'no light plume as a token.'"

"So much the better," laughed Sidney Landon as they sat down to hear a band of Roman students musically intone "Santa Lucia," with the unrepressed enthusiasm of the explosive Italian nature.

"Then, it is all arranged," joyously cried the sanguine Hatton. "I have no doubt the wine will hold up to the bush."

"I leave it all to you, Hatton."

"Suppose that you act as Quartermaster General to-morrow while I go and pay 'my official respects.' There is always one saving clause," gravely added Landon, with a serio-comic bow to Grimes. "We can be ejected, at any time, if we break the unwritten rules of your Eveless Paradise."

"I shall issue a writ of ne exeat," politely answered Grimes, as they fell into an easy chat.

Before they all strolled over to take a midnight peep at the Tiber from the Ponte San Angelo, Grimes and Landon had traced out twenty common friendships. The newly arrived pilgrims merrily laughed at Grimes' flashlight photographs of their still unknown acquaintances to be.

"Ah! Yes! Your official chief, Landon, Arthur Melville, has the soul of an impassioned artist in a Puritan body! I doff my beaver to his dainty wife! Madame Gertrude Melville has convinced even the difficile Italian noblesse that an American woman can be the 'grande dame,' even with no heraldic quarterings.

"You'll get on famously with them both! As you are fond of loneliness, Melville's official habits will suit you. He has an Italian famulus there, a

party with the atrocious name of Jacopo Maspero —who seems to enjoy doing all the work!

"Melville is conspicuous by his absence, but his home in the rambling old palace is the cradle of a graceful hospitality.

"Maspero knows his Rome, and all the slumbering vendettas of the Colonna and Orsini lurk in his veiled eyes and are hidden in his silken voice.

"All the notables and artist guild you will meet, soon enough, at their studios, or the American Club.

"There are a few really nice people here—you can soon sift out the lot at discretion. I have no advice to give to those 'who are at Rome also.' You will soon meet all the cads and traveling American nuisances officially,—so, gird on your armor! The round of so-called society has a strange undertow of picture and statue peddling in it."

"My respectable poverty is an ironclad defense," laughed Landon.

"Then,—all I can bid you is to avoid two things —flirtation, and the Roman fever!

"For the first, I will cure you by dragging you away into the Abruzzi, where no petticoat flaunt-

eth; for the last, Doctor Cæsar Corvini, the Legation and official physician, is a 'feste burg.'

"If you go in for riding, there's the Roman Hunt,—with lots of nice people, and if you are fond of athletics, 'Charley' Hollingsworth, our Harvard ex-champion, will coach you on the crooked Tiber, if he can drag you away, once that you are under her batteries, from his charming wife, Mrs. Elaine Hollingsworth, our bright particular social star."

They had reached the Place San Angelo, when Hatton bethought him of his own future connections. Grimes laughed with an unaccustomed glee as he sketched Robert Brandon.

"The very best fellow in Rome,—an admirable host,—an alleged artist,—the prince of good fellows, who manages—by hook or crook—to sell all his smears, and to leave no sting behind!"

"They say," growled Grimes, lowering his voice, "that he provides his artistic victims with funds to leave Rome secretly, after he has done them à la Monte Carlo. The Madame! Ay! There's the rub! No one has ever been strong enough to resist the many wiles of Mrs. Myra Brandon. A modern prototype of the Admirable

Crichton—from choosing a cameo to arranging a difficult match,—from matching a Roman scarf, to turning out a Minister Resident, from church to fair, and back through all the Midway Plaisance of fashionable folly. She is the wheel horse of the American colony.

"To you, Hatton, she will be of immense value! Modern Rome revolves around her ample form as a reliable human hub.

"To Captain Landon, she is the very acme of danger and deceit. She is the match maker of our time! If you run not upon the Scylla of one of her baby-faced blonde protégeés, you will be wrecked upon the dark beauties of some inviting dusky-eyed Charybdis of a brunette.

"She evolves the most inviting girls from social nothingness, and has actually married off a poor American girl to a rich Roman prince—a feat hitherto deemed impossible of achievement!"

They were looking at the stars twinkling on the Tiber and listening to Grimes' deep voice mouthing "Stop! For thy tread is on an Empire's dust!" when Hatton, in a business-like way, called up the name of Rawdon Clark.

The declaimer dropped into an energetic staccato.

"Oh! Yes! Your spick span new millionaire employer! Crœsus Magnus! He is a thin-lipped human shark," mercilessly proceeded Grimes. "If I met him in the Bad Lands I should surely jerk out my Winchester and cover him while in sight.

"In Texas, I should endeavor, 'pro bono publico,' to get him lynched, on early acquaintance. Otherwise, he would wind up with all the belongings of the vicinity. Omnivorous, active and energetic is this same Mr. Rawdon Clark,—withal a very smooth package—and he gets around nimbly, —even in a salon."

They were on their way homeward, bent on passing the location of the Eveless Paradise, when Grimes, after firing a last shot at Rawdon Clark, in calling him a "heartless human snake," broke out,—"You men will find life enough in old Rome! It does not seethe around you as in the modern Babylons, but the inundation of the Tiber, silent and unheralded, has swept away countless human lives. The social life of the old Mistress of the World is vastly complex.

"I knew *all* about it fifteen years ago,—*now,* I confess myself a tyro.

"Old McPherson, the photographer and club man, who has been here forty years, tells me he has been only hidden in a groove, and so wandering blindly! People go down here like in a tide rip, without a single cry."

It was with a nod,—and a hearty "al rivedersi" —that the newspaper cynic disappeared within the portals of the Eveless Paradise and left the tyros to wander back to the Hotel de Russie, watched only by the stars and the becloaked and cocked-hatted gens d'armes, lurking on the dark street corners.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE PINCIAN HILL.

Though Mr. Forrest Grimes of the New York Herald was a grim and worn cynic, still he was a man with a strong undercurrent of human sympathy. He had rightly divined that clouds hovered over Sidney Landon's abruptly broken off military life.

After the Captain had sought his lonely room, his pillow was haunted by changing visions of the past. The deep-toned clang of Rome's unnumbered church bells only accentuated the long vigils in which dream faces returned to torture the wound-weakened soldier into a vain unrest.

But, the keen-eyed man of the world was in error, when he fancied that a cloud of shame or some sudden fall from honor had driven Landon out of the "Grays."

Sorrow's mantle, alone, hung over the tossing soldier as he recalled the scene, on the far away headwaters of the Rio Grande, when a chance-found newspaper had brought the shock of his life to the iron-hearted young leader, hidden there under the mesquit bushes with his swarthy cavalrymen, grimly awaiting the coming of the mad Comanche riders. And all his beloved army life seemed hateful to him then!

Landon vainly tried to close the doors of the past upon these haunting visions,—the memory mist-wreaths which hid the secret which had astonished the whole "mess," when Sidney Landon sheathed his sword and abruptly left the

"Grays" with an insistence which smacked of some imminent crisis not otherwise to be averted.

Resolutely pacing his room, Landon read over his official instructions and sought for weariness in the platitudes of that unromantic red book, labeled "Consular Regulations," which was, as yet, a terra incognita to him.

He gazed out of the window into the blue and silent night, where the unfamiliar outlines of steepled Rome now took on fantastic shapes.

"The pen may be mightier than the sword," he sighed, "after all! There's Frank Hatton, dear old resolute soul, deliberately plodding his way upward in life, with not a single quickened beat of the pulse.

"So many hours, so many note books filled—so many days,—so many letters dispatched;—and,—the beef and beer of life is thus insured, with the unromantic modern garb which isn't half as picturesque as the skin mantles of the Stone age after all."

"Perhaps, in the society of this coterie of bright fellows, I may find forgetfulness." So, rolling the stone against the tomb, he ended his "night of memories and of sighs" in following down the

chance-made itinerary of his long voyage, since a lucky introduction from a college friend as the Aurania sailed gave him the bright-hearted Hatton as a fellow traveler.

It had been pleasant enough after all,—the chance led rambles over dewy Ireland,—the casual wanderings by Scottish tarns,—the restful glimpses of merrie England, the wild hurly burly of Paris, and the gliding panorama of the castled banks of the Rhine, where the thrifty steamer Ober-Kellner now replaces "the peasant girls with deep blue eyes, and hands which offer early flowers."

Switzerland's Alpen-locked lakes,—the superb defiles of the Tyrol,—and fair Lombardy's fruitful plains, where earth bares her richest bosom,—the "frozen music" of Milan's Duomo,—the treasures of the past, in the dusky chambers by the unfamiliar Arno,—all this varied panorama had charmed him where "under many a yellow star," they "dropped into the magic land."

But one temptation, a soul-racking one, had followed him on from Nice, when the dear old Consul Swasey had sent him a letter by special messenger. It was a letter from sturdy old Miles

Atwater, the Colonel of the Grays, forwarded on through the War and State Departments.

Sidney Landon drew the letter from his bosom and read it once more by the flickering light of the Hotel de Russie's two "superb" wax candles. His heart leaped up as he read the words laden with a tempting possibility—

"The President has promised me to reinstate you in the Army at any time within six months if you will only make an application. General Hatcher will soon be at Rome and,—I have been charged by him to talk to you. Remember, my dear boy! 'once a Captain,—always a Captain'—Listen to Hatcher. Our regimental officers are all of one mind; you could be appointed in the Staff and then transferred back to the old Regiment. I may come over myself and urge this,—if I can get leave. And,—lastly, Mrs. Atwater joins me in begging you to reconsider your resignation. You know that she owns you—for she nursed you back to life—in the old days!"

"Gallant old heart!" cried Landon, as he racked his soul in an agony of unrest! Suddenly starting up, he cried, "Let chance decide!"

Tossing up a coin, he muttered, "Heads,—Army!—Tails, I stay here!"

His face was pale as he picked up the two-franc piece. "I am to be a Roman," he murmured, with a sigh, as an old verse returned to haunt him now.

It was a soldier song of the days of the civil war,

"Never again on the shoulder, to wear our knightly bars,—
Never again on the shoulder, to bear our lordly leaves,—
Never again to dream the dream
Which martial music weaves."

And, tired out at last, his cares fell away from him then, as the needles are shaken from the gusty pines,—and the soldier who had faced the Apache rifles a hundred times slept until the bugles of a passing Bersaglieri corps woke him from dreams of the old life,—the beloved Regiment,—and the far horizoned western plains where every man guards his life with his own hand!

"Do I look decorously professional, Old Reliable?" cheerfully queried Landon as he sallied forth at ten a. m., having achieved as non-military a toilet as the habit of eleven long years would permit.

The friends had breakfasted merrily and already Hatton was delivering over their effects to Battisto, the factotum of the Eveless Paradise.

"All but the red book,—that smacks too much of Baedeker, and that enforced martyrdom,—a ten days' rush through Rome, 'personally conducted by Thomas Cook and Son.' "

"J'y suis,—j'y reste," gaily cried Landon. "That, sir, is the code I am to live up to, now,—my signal book for battle with the unterrified American tourist. I am off."

"You are to come to the Consulate General, after you have hunted up the Brandons, and duly made your social report!"

"I will begin my 'arduous labors' by asking for a day off—to arrange my urgent private affairs. It might be well to inspect the cuisine of the Eveless Paradise, and see that we are fed not upon tomtits and those wretched yellow snails!"

Hatton merrily rejoined, "Grimes awaits us at two for a house-warming breakfast, and will guide us to the Pincian in due form, and will show us all Rome that is knowable. So away with you! Make your first plunge!"

As Frank Hatton watched Landon stride away,

with his springy, soldierly step, he never imagined that the crisis of a life had been passed, and that the innocent looking letter just dropped in the box bore homewards Landon's firm refusal of the President's kindly offer to take up again the old free wild life of the plains, under the fluttering silken guidons of the Grays.

Many an approving eye followed the young American as he strode down the Via Babuino, a notable contrast to the faineants dawdling along the Corso.

"Photography has ruined travel now," mused Landon, as at every turn familiar objects met his eye. "The freshness of first sensation is gone,—for, in all this, I only see the blurred recollections of the Voyage autour de ma Chambre. Everything turns up with the instant suggestion, 'I have seen all this before—but, *where?*' "

Resting to gaze at the motley throng in the Piazzi di Spagna,—Landon culled one thought from his morning glimpses of the Corso and the Via Babuino.

He finished his cigar as he idly scanned the grouped models, after he had escaped the onrush

of the cab drivers, and the clattering attacks of the mutilated beggars.

"Nothing seems to have survived of the olden beauty of the women," he mused. "All the garnered loveliness of Italian womanhood in the galleries has vanished forever. Perhaps womanly beauty is only transmitted in splendid aristocracies or floats down the dead golden tide of our modern money luxury. Here,—only a few officers seem to have preserved the stately old Italian beauty of feature! These heroes of the boudoir and the higher priesthood seem to be the only classes who can now cultivate 'la hermosura' in a fitting idleness! And—on woman here—lies the heavy burden of unending drudgery! The glories of the Decameron have flitted forever." Landon was ignorant of the fact that the whole Continent of Europe is paved with the bones of the woman drudge.

The man who had breasted the cliffs of the Lava Beds laughed at the hundred and twenty-five steps of the Scala de Spagna, and, then, his face grew sober as he turned southeastwardly and halted at the open archway of a dingy old palace.

"Sufficiently threadbare and uninviting," he

murmured as he gazed at the faded glories of the hideous oval tin consular shield, whereon the eagle of our country ramped in ghastly grays, blues and yellows.

With the composure of Daniel in the lions' den, Captain Sidney Landon ascended two sufficiently inconvenient stairs and strode into the main room of the Consulate General of the United States of America.

Nothing relieved the utterly repellant interior, but a glimpse of blue sky at the open windows,—the gurgle of a hidden fountain below in the gardens where waving tree tops brushed the windows of the old overhung palace, now, in its decadence, given over to a pretentious public, economically aristocratic.

Landon had already sought out a dozen American Consulates in their skilfully chosen hiding places. This was the same repellant interior.

Raw red tiled floor,—wheezy looking tables,—fly-spotted "affiches," and, a thin array of chairs. A few sparsely filled book shelves carried the sporadic "archives," and, at the door, a dejected Italian youth, the possessor of a mongrel English, lay on watch in wait for the bold intruder.

By a lonely window—a pale-faced American clerk was toiling over huge blue sheets of the sacred despatch paper—while, at the end of the room, well fortified behind two long tables, littered with bundles of paper,—Signore Jacopo Maspero was systematically defending himself against a motley crowd of Americans of all ages, sexes and "previous conditions" of personal experience.

With an amused smile, Landon finally fought his way to the front and presented his card.

With an obsequious leap, Signore Maspero rose and led the Vice Consul General within his fortification of Dictionaries and Patent Office Reports.

Tall, dusky, with eyes of glowing intensity, Signore Maspero furtively warded off the impatient crowd, while he suavely stated that he would announce the new official to his Chief.

Landon laughed inwardly while waiting for the return of the detached messenger, and idly scanned his own pile of accumulated letters, as he picked up from Maspero's rapid despatch of business the secret of official duty.

Every one seemed to ask for impossibilities. They had come on the wrong day or were else doomed to hear the word *"Impossible"* uttered in

tones of silky decision. An official machine grinding out gruff negations.

Conscious that the factotum was slyly regarding him, the Captain simply bowed formally, thrust his letters in his pockets, and followed the returned messenger, gracefully escaping the outstretched hands of several fellow citizens bent upon plucking some official consolation from his coat sleeves.

It was only the prospect of the castled Tiber, gleaming golden in the bright October sunshine far below, which stifled a sudden pang of regret for the hasty dispatch of the letter of the morning.

"I may live if I keep out of this den," he murmured as he walked down a grand old gallery to another wing of the palazzo. "It is about as romantic as a fourth-class corner grocery in its environment." The title of Vice Consul General seemed to have a cheaper ring in its announcement, after gazing upon his theatre of action.

A tap from an old carven knocker recalled Landon, as he entered an octagonal room, from whose windows the rarest vistas of Rome were visible.

There was an easel in a fair light, and a slight,

delicate man courteously advanced to meet his visitor.

In a moment, Arthur Melville had made his fellow official cordially welcome.

Landon surveyed, in wonder, the superb tapestries of the walls, the glowing Persian rugs upon the floor.

Besides a huge divan, with a splendid outspread tiger skin before its inviting bulk, the only piece of furniture in the room was a rare cabinet of antique ebony and ivory.

Upon this stood a vase of matchless old Venetian and a Cellini silver misericorde dagger lay by its side.

But one picture hung upon the walls—that of a thrillingly beautiful woman, with one rounded arm displayed as she drew back a broidered curtain, and,—a rosy finger pressed upon her smiling lip!

It needed not the word "Invitation," graven upon the frame, to translate the witchery of the canvas.

Sidney Landon leaned back and laughed softly in the anti-climax of the surroundings of the moment.

Melville clapped his hands and in a moment old Joconda, wrinkled like the Fates, had served coffee and cigarettes.

The young Captain recognized the artist in his Chief's delicate features,—his blue-veined transparent hands,—the slight yet graceful mould of form and the waving silken hair.

Clear brown eyes, with the glassy sheen of the idealist,—a soft, restrained voice and a manner of modulated courtesy, proved that Arthur Melville was not of this workaday world.

"I fear, Captain," he gently said, "that you found the Consulate rather uninviting." Landon bowed in a polite deprecation.

His host, however, was not deceived.

"I see but little of it. You will find Deputy Vice Consul General Maspero,—very capable,—and an admirable cicerone, by the way. Young Mr. Morgan is untiring, and,—I believe that he is intelligent. He is an official Consular clerk! The other people will give you no trouble. In fact, Maspero attends to all. I am there very seldom myself!"

"I am quite ready to enter at once upon my

duties," resolutely remarked Landon, "after a day or so to settle myself."

The quick-witted Captain could see that there was a good painting light. Melville's tell-tale eyes strayed toward the beloved canvas.

"Then, I have but one command to lay upon you—Mrs. Melville will be happy to receive you, at dinner, en petite comité, to-night at eight! I shall leave you free hand as to the office.

"I have received many kindly letters regarding you, and we will surely find we have hosts of friends in common. We shall try to make Rome pleasant for you."

In answer to the artist official's query as to his address, Landon was charmed to hear his host say, "Grimes is a man of the rarest social talents! You cannot go wrong in Rome under his guidance!

"He is the head of 'Young Rome,' and, withal, a man of the rarest gifts!"

Landon was startled at the sounding echo of his own footsteps as he walked away through the lonely hall.

"There is happiness"—he mused—"a man who builds his own dream castles and—lives in them.

If this æsthetic Puritan has found his fitting mate in Mrs. Gertrude Melville, then—the thorns are few in his rosy pillow."

Melville's fortune, breeding and powerful political influence had kept the gentle sinecure many years in Rome, most judiciously shielded by his office absences from daily carking cares and official fret.

There was an unwonted activity in the Consulate General as Landon entered. A desk and fittings had been skirmished for, and before the rosy Hatton arrived to drag him away, the Captain began to admire the tireless energy and easy insolence of the indefatigable Maspero.—He was relieved when Hatton pounced down upon him.

"Well?" anxiously demanded Hatton, as the two young men left, after a few pleasant words with the pale faced Morgan, a consumptive and intelligent young student in search of health, who had drifted into the bare subsistence of a Consular clerkship as a defense against the wolf.

Landon laughed gaily. "It's all right! Signore Jacopo Maspero seems to be the autocrat of the institution, with an ostrich-like capacity for official toil which I shall not disturb. He seems to

digest everything. Morgan is a decent little chap enough. My chief is a delightful dreamer, a thoroughbred, and—I am to meet 'la dame blanche,' his household queen, to-night at dinner. I left my duty cards. To-morrow, I shall make all my consular calls en grande tenue.

"Ca ira. I have changed my mind. I shall lock up the red book and allow Maspero to gradually instruct me! I expect to become wise by induction! And you? What is your harvest? Nothing but leaves?"

They had safely steered across the Piazza de Spagna, and were navigating up the Corso, with its "trattorias,"—its show windows gleaming with cheap gewgaws and false antiques,—its squalor and splendor,—its tide of unexpectedly familiar tourists,—its priests, soldiers, beggars and loiterers, before Hatton could sketch the details of his visit to that Promised Land—Robert Brandon's studio.

"It looks all right enough!" rather doubtfully concluded Hatton, loth to sit in harsh judgment. "Of course, they are very kind and all that."

"Brandon is coming over to meet us at Grimes' initial breakfast. By the way, he says that the

Eveless Paradise is a veritable haven for us, as Grimes is a Defender of the Faithful.

"Just the man to post you, and to launch me, journalistically. Brandon says that I can pick all my weekly letters by feeding on these fellows' freshness.

"As for Brandon's studio, it seems to be only an artistic 'bucket-shop,'—of course—there's a union of the practical and the ideal! He has his living to make.

"I'm not so sure about his pictures! I caught sight of two or three young Italians working up backgrounds and legs and arms."

Landon's laugh made the melancholy passers-by start.

"Like the American sculptors with a squad of twenty Italian stone masons hammering out masterpieces!"

"Just so," dryly resumed the journalist.

"But the overpowering thing is Myra Brandon. She has definitely traced out our relationship, moved it up a couple of degrees and several generations nearer! She is a human battleship,—a multum in parvo! She has simply swooped down

upon me! She has promptly undertaken to make a man of me!"

Hatton stopped and mopped his honest brow.

"And,—*Rawdon Clark?*" slowly said Landon, as he saw Hatton's brow darken.

"I met him, there, poking over Brandon's pictures and engaging Mrs. B—— to matronize a grand dinner which he is to give at the Hotel Costanzi. It appears he has some lovely American girl here in his eye—'with ulterior views,' of making her Mrs. Crœsus Clark."

"What sort is he?" anxiously demanded the Captain. "I think that he is a thorough-paced cad," very decidedly replied the writer, as they saw Grimes waiting, à la porte du Paradis, to pounce upon them—"but, I'll know more after to-morrow night.

"I have to dine there to meet him, and others. I wish he were out of my way—but,—I hear that he's a fixture here as long as Naëra of the golden hair lingers."

With gleeful rapacity, Grimes bore down upon his two neophytes and then led them into the general assembly room of the Eveless Paradise.

There was a hearty welcome awaiting the pilgrims at the table where two draped American

flags reminded the score of assembled good fellows of the land for whose integrity a half million brave men had died under the consecrated folds.

A dozen universities, as many different callings, and a baker's dozen of different states, were represented in the bright-hearted circle of gay fellows under thirty.

Landon had been led away to see his two quaintly romantic chambers where, already, Baptiste had laid out his things, when the merry breakfast room was invaded by Mr. Robert Brandon.

The soldier vainly tried to resist the infection of the artist's all-round manner.

Portly of frame, ruddy of hue, cheery and insistent, with a dome-like rounded head and banker-like side whiskers,—the mercantile artist deftly oiled the hinges of every unopened human door around him.

It was only when the two hours' banquet was waning to its close that Landon found time to whisper to Hatton: "If his wife is a fit running mate, I can easily see why the bucket-shop studio is a go!"

Whereat Hatton only feebly smiled, for he was

now firmly entangled in the meshes of the Brandon net, and doomed to fight under their colors in Rome—and, in his heart of hearts, he felt fated to be a tout for the social pushing off of those remarkable canvases wherever Brandon only condescended to add ears, eyes, hands and noses, the tails of horses, pretty woman under the tree, and "such small deer," to the efforts of his artistic job workmen.

Sidney Landon, too, was also in the toils, he had fallen a victim to Brandon's perfunctory hospitality for the dinner of the morrow. No friendly spirit whispered to him Mrs. Myra Brandon's parting injunction to her spouse on this fateful morning, "Remember, Robert, he can be very useful to us in the Consulate! We *must* cultivate him!"

Yet, it was a red-letter day when the last chorus had ceased, the nervous Italian countess upstairs had resumed her afternoon nap, and Grimes escaped with his prizes in a charmingly appointed carriage for a long drive in the gardens of the Villa Borghese.

The quickening warmth of these new fellowships lightened Sidney Landon's heart, as he

watched Frank Hatton delightedly drinking in the veteran Roman's keenly critical babble, while they slowly threaded the charming groves where countless hearts have beat in rapture or mutely broken in the fierce old days when Roman passion seethed around the splendid Papal throne.

"I have kept the best for *the last,*" sagely observed Forrest Grimes as the sun declined to its glorious setting.

They were enraptured as they slowly crowned the beautiful Pincio, where Nature smiles still in her unfading beauty.

Landon sat as in a day dream, enjoying the superb view from the terrace, while Grimes, with deft touches, brought up the old days when Lucullus reigned, the supreme arbiter of the social world,—over the gardens where the mad Messalina later lit the torches of Venus in men's throbbing hearts.

The green-bowered Villa Medici, with its gray turrets, lay there under Hadrian's obelisk, and. far away,—the huge dome of St. Peter's hung like an eternal benediction over the Queen City of all Time!

Landon listened to the wind-borne laughter of

the women far below in the charming Passeggiata, while the wooing music of the band set every pulse beating and every arched-stepped foot tapping with Strauss' dreamy waltzes!

There were double lines of stately carriages, now slowly moving on, while groups of ardent cavaliers leaned over the low sides, murmuring loving words into the shell-like ears shaded by the protecting fans.

Sidney Landon forgot to listen to the dissertations upon the Castella San Angelo,—the eternal Pantheon,—the glories of the Querinal, and the romance-haunted banks of the Tiber.

"All the Roman world and his sister are here," merrily said Grimes, in a change of key.

"For sheer consolidated love-making, this is the garden spot of God's footstool, and, now and then, you will see an Italian woman who is not half bad looking,——" he stopped abruptly, as Landon, with a convulsive gesture, grasped his arm,—*"Do you know who that is?"* the Captain quickly said, while his voice took an unwonted softness.

"That's Clark,—Rawdon Clark,—the American Crœsus," briskly replied Grimes.

But, while Frank Hatton craned his neck to glance at his new master once more, Captain Landon made no sign. His eyes were very dreamy, and he was gazing distraitly at a receding carriage.

There was the gleam of golden hair,—the graceful curve of a neck with the sweep of the Venus of Milo,—and, a sigh from Landon, as a high break with a party of Italian military dandies blocked the road from view. He was strangely and moodily silent for the rest of the outing.

They drove silently back in the sunset's dying splendors, but all Grimes' diamond wit failed to awaken Landon's flagging interest.

He was still lingering under the spell of eyes which had met his own in one of those flashlight glances thrown across life's darkened seas which shine out unforgotten through all the lingering years.

The soldier was murmuring those words of Buchanan Read, when the carriage drew up with a crash at the narrow gateway of the Eveless Paradise,—

> "She came as comes the summer wind,—
> A gust of beauty to my heart."

But his lively companions were now deep in a plot to thrust Hatton into the "foremost and focal fire" of Rome's intellectual circles, and, hence, they did not see that something more than the glow of the setting sun had stolen into the lonely soldier's heart.

It was under the soft starlight that Sidney Landon wandered down alone to the Piazza Spagna, after leisurely making his dinner toilet. His thoughts were not at his own command, for as he crested the Scala de Spagna, his mind was far away on the Pincian Hill,—lingering still in contemplation of that lovely, womanly apparition which had flashed by him as the sunset in its glowing blood-red embers.

"If there is any such woman in the world as she seems to be," he mused, "then,—beauty has not fled from Egeria's bower. And—she did not seem to be an Italian."

He was still in a dream as he threaded the long hall in the now deserted palazzo on the hill.

The young soldier hardly lifted his eyes as the butler ushered him into Mrs. Gertrude Melville's drawing room. There was that softened light which ladies love in the splendid apartment,

though silvery gleams lit up the dining hall beyond! He bowed low over Mrs. Melville's hand as that incomparably charming lady welcomed him to the Eternal City.

And then all the blood rushed to his cheeks as his hostess said, "We shall be a little party of four! Miss Hawthorn, Captain Landon."

There was a tingle in every bounding pulse as the young man woke from his day dream with a start!

"I think we met to-day——" Miss Agnes softly said, her eyes dropping before that unconsciously ardent glance.

"On the Pincian," murmured Landon, as he offered the goddess his arm.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE TOMB OF CECILIA METELLA.

There was no social ice to break in the little dinner party, for sundry little radial lines of sympathy had already been traced out long before the matchless Luigi and his perfectly trained as-

sistants had reached the service of the unapproachable Italian ices and confetti.

Arthur Melville descended from the cloudland of art long enough to remind Sidney Landon that General Rufus Hatcher was a cherished "ami de maison."

"My poor brother Will was killed on his staff at Spottsylvania," sighed the dilettante, "and, the General has written, congratulating me on your coming as my confrère here!"

"The fact is, Captain," said Melville, "when I accepted this post, it was quasi diplomatic! The Vatican Legation had been abolished, and our Italian Minister Resident was then located at Florence.

"We have grown into Rome; our little girl was born here,—and, in the past, the holding of this sinecure post opened all the art treasures, even those of the reserved chambers of the Vatican, to me!

"Now that we are knitted by friendships to the shy, proud Italian noblesse, thanks to Gertrude, I am ready to yield up the position.

"The pressure of tourist and business relatives becomes heavier daily,—the monetary responsi-

bilities are large,—and General Hatcher writes me wonders as to your executive ability. I would feel much safer to see the office under your control.

"I sometimes doubt Maspero. He is just a little too smooth! But, Hatcher declares that he will have you back in the army."

Landon's eyes strayed around the superb apartment. It was easy to divine that the gentle-hearted artist only lived in the realms of form and color, while the social sway of the family, the executive reins of their daily life, and all sublunary matters were guided by the firm little hands of the uncrowned American queen who had blessed Melville's life.

Madame Gertrude's slight, girlish form,—her small, well-poised head,—her steadfast, brown eyes shining out under an unruffled brow, proved the woman "nobly planned."

At thirty-five and twenty-seven—the pair were still notable lovers, and Landon easily divined the power behind the throne in learning that Madame Gertrude was the favorite niece of one of America's colossal money magnates,—a man whose thunderbolts easily shook financial thrones.

It was only when Melville had lured Miss Hawthorn away to his studio for a short art colloquy that Sidney Landon felt relieved of the imperial presence of the young goddess of the Pincian.

Little Elsie Melville, a lovely sprite of five, flitted before the visitor a new charm to the man who was beginning already to doubt the eternal fitness of an Eveless Paradise.

"I must make friends with you, Captain Landon," said the hostess, "for I am anxious to see Arthur shielded and aided by some one of resolution and courage!

"The frank, bustling American does not easily penetrate all the deep subtlety of the Italian character.

"Of all countries in Europe, we assimilate here the least! I believe in putting none but Americans on guard."

She pointed smilingly to the two silken American banners glorifying the dusky richness of the stately dining room.

"You will have a career yet in diplomacy, though. I know that the army is loth to lose you. *I know all!*" she smilingly said.

"Colonel Atwater married my mother's beloved

schoolmate, and Mary Atwater has been already singing your praises. I shall try to make Rome so pleasant that you will not wish to leave us!"

Mrs. Melville saw the shade of grave concern which darkened Landon's face, as he bent over the lovely child, his hand straying through the silken wreath framing the sweet face.

"Certainly, you will be at my disposal as escort," lightly resumed Mrs. Melville. "Arthur is wedded to his art. Time is fleeting, and I am charged with unfolding the glories of Rome to Agnes Hawthorn. We shall claim a share of your leisure, and I hope that you will begin slowly in the official remodeling of the office.

"Frankly, Signore Maspero looks upon you as the one who will take away the reins of his power! His position has been both enviable and lucrative —for an Italian. But, he needs a curb!"

Captain Landon murmured an acquiescence, but turned his head away to conceal a deepened color.

"Tell me of Miss Hawthorn," he said, with affected carelessness.

"You see her, as she is," fondly said Gertrude Melville.

"ON THE PINCIAN" * * * AS HE OFFERED THE GODDESS HIS ARM.—*Page 52.*

"Our families have been linked by the closest friendship of a generation.

"When Agnes was left an orphan by the death of both her parents in a fearful Atlantic shipwreck, my dear mother took the child to her heart. With all her enormous fortune, her life has been lonely enough.

"Lawyers, guardians and Philadelphia Trust Companies are cheerless surroundings for a woman in the flower of her beauty.

"It seems sad," sighed the lady, "that such wealth should bring down the jackal tribe of fortune hunters upon Agnes, but it has!

"Last year was her first season. Released from the gentle tyranny of Bryn Mawr, Agnes has fled over here for an indefinite stay. Here we can, in a measure, shield her for a time! She is the sister of my heart.

"But, alas, her splendid, stately, daily life at the palatial Hotel Costanzi,—her complete establishment,—the deference of bankers and shopkeepers draws down the swarm of mournful-eyed Italian Princes, and all the hungry visiting noblesse fluttering around the salons of the best circles here."

Landon gloomily said, "It seems that women must be either hunted down for the beauty of their skins, or else trapped for the gold so needful to the heiress hunter."

"It is too bad," murmured Mrs. Melville. "Agnes is a gifted, bright-hearted and sincere woman. She should not meet her fate under false lights! She is only happy and at home with us, in our little circle.

"The Brandons are distant, very distant connections. There is some Kentucky cousinship, very remote, with Robert Brandon. You will dine there to-morrow night, you tell me! You will see a strange social menagerie," Gertrude Melville laughed merrily.

"Robert Brandon is a bustling, fatuous soul,—profoundly happy in a colossal vanity,—and his art rooms are carried on 'for revenue only.' He is harmless enough in his own bourgeois way!

"His wife," said Gertrude, with a determined flash of her eyes, "is a distinct social meddler,—an intrigante,—a busybody,—and determined to force the attentions of this nouvean riche man-eater Rawdon Clark upon my lovely friend.

"And so," she decisively said, "Agnes is forced

to take refuge in visits to me, which baffle the 'Encyclopedia.'

"Arthur always wages a determined war upon Brandon's alleged art, and so our home is 'terra incognito' to that faction."

It was easy to see the chevaux de frise fencing out the Brandons.

When Elsie Melville had been duly kissed and sent to the Land of Nod, Landon rapidly seized upon the pith of his hostess' remarks, while the return of his host and Miss Hawthorn gave him a breathing spell, while the fair visitor and the enthusiast fought over again their battle as to respective art values of the Venus of the Capitol and the Florentine marvel.

The chatter of Grimes returned to enlighten him,—Hutton's remarks as to Clark's career,—the presence of the capitalist dogging Miss Hawthorn's carriage in the Pincian, and the projected diner de societè,—all these were pregnant with social meaning.

"The campaign is already laid out," mused the soldier, "Mr. Rawdon Clark probably knows of this solid Philadelphia fortune,—of the pyramidal social position of the Hawthorns.

"The closed doors of mansions and clubs would soon open to Agnes Hawthorn's husband,—and the financial magnates would unbend to the powerful stranger once anchored down locally! For, people buy everything now,—seats in the Senate, —the dignity of Governor, and, even all the trappings of the First Citizen."

The soldier's eye rested gravely upon that ardently enthusiastic woman face, flower-like, in its beauty.

Nineteen golden years were reflected in the maiden's sunny hair, the violets of all the happy springs in those deep-lashed, splendid eyes. The splendor of youth modeled the superb lines of her figure.

Landon's memory recalled Eugenie de Montijo in that vernal loveliness which swept the cold-hearted Bonaparte off his feet and changed the destiny of France.

The flute-like voice had lulled him until he woke with a start as Miss Hawthorn directly addressed him.

"If I mistake not,—Captain Landon,—I owe your gallant regiment an unpaid debt of sorrowing gratitude. You knew my cousin Willy Grear.

who died at the hands of those frightful Utes?"

"He was my beloved classmate, Miss Hawthorn," gravely answered the soldier.

"Then," cried Agnes Hawthorn, clasping her jeweled hands in a sudden emotion. "You can tell me the name of the young Cavalry officer who, with three men, repelled the murderers and saved him from the last horrible mutilation of Indian warfare!"

"I have heard of the occurrence," answered Landon, rising suddenly. "I think it was in 1878, but I do not now remember the officer's name."

"He was of your own regiment, the Grays," the heiress persisted, "and,—in my girlish school-days, I vowed to find out the man who,—alone,—exposed himself to the red men's fire, while his little party, from a safe ambush, turned back the murderous brutes with their rifles! *For such a man,*—I could go around the world,—only to tell him," she said with sparkling eyes, "what an American woman thinks of a brave man!"

Mrs. Melville started at the sudden pallor of Landon's face.

"Excuse me," he said. "The hour is already late, and—" he said lightly, "I must go into

official harness in the morning. I shall have the honor of meeting you, I believe, at dinner to-morrow evening at the Brandons."

When the young soldier had made his graceful adieux, the two women gazed blankly at each other.

"There must have been something very painful," murmured Agnes, "in these old recollections. I am told that classmates become deeply attached to each other at West Point!"

Gertrude Melville was still lost in astonishment at Landon's abrupt departure, when her husband returned from escorting his guest to the cavernous stairway of "il grande palazzo vecchio."

In one hand he held his office keys,—in the other, a gray pasteboard-bound Army Register. Arthur Melville smiled knowingly as he said, "Ladies! I will read to you from the Medal of Honor record of 1878:

"First Lieutenant Sĭdney Landon, ——th U. S. Cavalry, medal of honor for heroic gallantry in personally exposing himself to the fire of a hostile band of Utes to draw their fire, while his detachment, from safe position, inflicted the heaviest loss upon the enemy, thus rescuing, un-

mutilated, the body of Captain William Grear, U. S. Ordnance, who had been treacherously slain."

Agnes Hawthorn sprang up, standing there, —beautiful, thrilling, living statue, with her hands crossed upon her bosom, as Melville quietly closed the book.

"When you next meet him, Agnes," he simply said, "you can say, '*Thou art the man!*' "

There were diamond tears fringing the beautiful lashes as the young goddess silently clasped Gertrude Melville's hands!

"God bless him," murmured the young mother, as she led her speechless guest away to the happiest of slumbers.

Far below them, Sidney Landon was stalking through the shadowed Piazza de Spagna.

"They must never know!" he muttered, as the mist of years rolled away and he saw once more the gray hills of Utah,—and the crack of rifles, long silent, came back to memory. "It was not much, after all,—any good man would have done the same."

Landon was strangely silent in the bright Valhalla of the Eveless Paradise, where Frank Hat-

ton was the center of a lively bevy of the foreign literate of the Eternal City.

The son of old Rutgers had already projected "works" of great magnitude under the inspiration of the scenes storied in his youthful classic digging.

Hatton marveled when they reached their apartment at Landon's brief comment upon the Melville establishment over the last evening pipe.

"Nice enough people," remarked the soldier, with a crafty guile newly born.

"They all seem to be very fond of Grimes. Melville tells me that he holds the highest possible social position compatible with,——"

"Working for a living, you mean! Out with it!" good-naturedly said Hatton. "But they tell me, all here, that Melville's home is a fairy palace, —marble halls and all that! They are gilt-edged swells, rich as cream and can buy out a lot of the Colonnas and Orsinis."

"They are all well enough," wearily said Landon. "I am only an incident of their lives! The lady is a witching fairy, sweet and earnest, and is a niece of the great Ogden Mowbray!"

Hatton's whistle of astonishment gave way to a last query. "Anybody else there?"

"*Nobody to speak of!*" remarked the Captain, as he knocked out his pipe. "From what I hear we will have a song and dance entertainment at the Brandons!"

"Yes!" gloomily answered Hatton, "and that despotic cad, Rawdon Clark, has sent me a letter to call on him at the American Club to-morrow at eleven, 'to learn his wishes governing my letters from Europe!' "

Sidney Landon was glad to escape into his own apartment, where he sat for an hour gazing out into the night.

The face of "nobody to speak of" returned to haunt him, and he saw her again, with that sweetly impassioned face!

"I would go through the whole Ute tribe for such a woman," mused the lonely man, as he laid his head upon his pillow. "Strange that we should both be alone in the world! That fellow Clark must be a nice specimen of 'true American manhood!' "

There was one supremely happy man in Rome upon the morrow of this initial entrée of Captain

Sidney Landon into Roman life. That man was the pale-faced Consular Clerk Edwin Morgan, who, open-eyed in wonder, heard the Consul General inform Signore Jacopo Maspero that henceforth Vice Consul General Landon would assume the entire active management of the office.

"Captain Landon will receive all your reports and use my name without question," suavely said the happy artist, as he fled away to save three hours of splendid painting light. It was a consular upheaval!

There was a suppressed scowl on Maspero's face as Landon took his seat, with a quiet dignity, at the official opening hour. "I shall now turn all over to you, Signore Capitano?" sulkily said the Italian.

"By no means, remarked Landon, with a searching glance of his steady eyes. "I shall proceed to make a thorough examination of the whole office accounts for the past ten years.

"As Mr. Morgan is a perfect Italian scholar, he will hereafter conduct all business jointly with you, and he will represent *me!* I have a State Department order to engage another copyist, and he will relieve Mr. Morgan. I desire no business

of importance to be transacted which I do not personally supervise. But you can get orders from Mr. Morgan in all things without waiting for me."

The Italian bowed in silence.

The wandering American public, gathering in at the hour of ten, found a singular courtesy in Signore Maspero's new manner, and the crafty Italian smothered an oath when he observed his new Chief and the young student depart for luncheon together.

"This will be our general rule, Signore," remarked the Vice Consul General.

And thus the reign of King Stork in that Consulate General came to an end, giving way to one soon destined to revolutionize the methods which had dealt out humble pie in large quantities to the distracted tourist.

Captain Sidney Landon was in a fairly cheerful mood when the loyal Hatton, with much flourish, presented him to the hostess of the evening at Mrs. Myra Brandon's resplendent establishment on the Via Babuino.

An imposing woman of an impressive middle

age was Madame Myra, firmly insistent in voice and manner.

Fortified in network of chain and bangle,—with suspiciously raven hair, and piercing, round unsmiling black eyes, the wave of her fan or the side glance of her watchful orbs brought the bustling Brandon to her side at once.

"I can only make my peace by buying a picture," mused Landon. "I wonder if there are any very small ones!"

But the walls were only resplendent with the hugest spoils of Brandon & Co.'s artistic bows and spears,—regular wall coverers.

Landon was awaiting the awful moment of dinner assignment when Mr. Brandon descended upon him.

"Captain, allow me," the host exclaimed, as he dragged the young official into a corner and presented him to Mr. Rawdon Clark.

The eyes of the two men met in that quiet, instantaneous assumption of hostility with which nature has endowed certain antagonistic souls.

As Landon escaped, he could not but hear the loudly whispered aside of the man of money:

"Army fellow—isn't he? I hear he has some place in the Consulate."

But Landon forgot to contemplate the outer man of Crœsus as Mrs. Brandon flusteringly fell upon Miss Agnes Hawthorn, the latest arrival.

"Now, our golden circle is complete!" gushed the hostess. "Mr. Clark, you will take in Miss Hawthorn?"

"Pardon me one moment," coldly remarked Miss Hawthorn, as Captain Landon bent over her hand.

"Mrs. Montgomery, let me present Captain Landon," she said as the soldier was made acquainted with the sweet-faced widowed woman who was the Grand Inside Guard of the heiress' daily life.

Miss Agnes was a dream of beauty in her clinging robes of white with a corsage knot of Parma violets. She found time to whisper to the cavalryman, "You are strangely forgetful of names, sir! I have learned how you won your medal of honor!"

Before Landon had raised his eyes, he was whisked away by the voluble hostess.

"As our ranking United States officer, you have the place of honor, *at my side, sir.*"

In all the clatter of the polyglot circle, Landon did not forget the keen, vulpine craft of the woman who had nailed Agnes Hawthorn to the pillory of public attention as Rawdon Clark's possible matrimonial prey.

The Austrians, Russians, French and Italians chattered around that noisy board, devouring the gathered American beauties with their eyes, while Landon strove to shut his ears to Brandon's boastful announcement of the purchase of his two great historical pictures by "my friend, Mr. Clark."

"Such a fascinating man,—a wonderful man, Captain," raved on the hostess.

"He has ordered his architect to build a gallery in his new house especially for the 'Boadicea Beaten with Rods,' and 'The Death of Alaric!' Oh! if only more Americans were like him!"

The soldier quietly "sized up" the hard-featured capitalist at Agnes Hawthorn's side.

Rawdon Clark's outer man was perfectly en règle—"Has a good valet," murmured the Captain.

The man himself, on the sunny side of forty, sturdily built, with a strongly cast face, carried in

his cool, gray eyes and heavy jaw the ear-marks of personal power.

Closely waving wiry dark hair,—a slightly frosted mustache,—firmly set, pitiless lips, and a heavily cleft chin, with the sternly carven facial lines of the financial operator, the whole ensemble denoted the "Silver King" type,—the man who had arrived, through desperate struggle and soul-eating persistence.

"Not a fellow to tackle lightly," thought the soldier, "and, a man who will have a good deal of his own way."

There was one memory of the Brandon dinner which never faded from Landon's mind. It was the furtive inventorial glance with which Clark surveyed the proud young beauty at his side.

Miss Hawthorn seemed to have developed a slightly glacial manner, when the long drawn out feast ended!

And, she seemed to have reserved her smiles largely for the courtly old Count Esterholz, the Austrian minister, seated at her other side, for the old bon vivant was the soul of courtesy, de la vieille roche.

But once during the dinner did Landon catch a

fleeting glance from the lovely eyes which had spoken so eloquently to him at their meeting. And their friendly gleams seemed to say, "Wait! Wait!"

With a quiet decision, Sidney Landon ignored Brandon's officious cordiality when the ladies retired. "I do not take wine," he decisively remarked, as he rose to follow the ladies.

"You are a poor army man, then!" sharply interjected Rawdon Clark, who had just made an autocratic sign to Hatton. *"Did you address me?"* sternly demanded the soldier.

And, strangely enough, the millionaire was silent as Landon passed out into the drawing room. "He dropped his eye, at any rate," mused Landon, as he sought the side of Mrs. Montgomery.

The little artifice succeeded, for in a few moments Miss Hawthorn joined her chaperone.

In the dining room, Clark had found a tardy consolation in remarking, "Brandon, your friend is pretty sharp set for a broken down army officer! Cut him out of my dinner list!"

There was a gloomy silence between the two

friends as Hatton and Landon walked home through the deserted Via Babuino.

At last the journalist broke into angry speech. "Do you know that cur Clark has actually ordered me to attend his swell dinner for Miss Hawthorn at the Hotel Costanzi and to 'feature it' for the journal! I think that I will resign!"

"Nonsense, my boy," coolly answered the Captain. "Don't fall out at the first skirmish!"

"He is a brute and a tyrant," indignantly cried Hatton, now thoroughly out of temper. "He is giving me a lot of slush about his art treasures and his new home—and—he darkly intimates that this pretty Miss Hawthorn is to be its future mistress!"

"Oh! He does—does he? Well! *Damn his impertinence!*" cried Landon as they regained their abode.

That night a new feeling of cold isolation in the world possessed the lonely soldier. "It's the old Juggernaut business," he growled. "I suppose, as usual, money will have its way."

A month later, the glories of Mr. Rawdon Clark's superb feast were forgotten save by the distant readers of Hatton's unwilling tribute.

The Roman season was briskly coming on, and the American colony had set up an idol in the shape of the dignified and effective Vice Consul General.

It was true that the gossips wondered to see the handsome young soldier choose Arthur Melville's fairy child Elsie as his companion.

The Quirinal Gardens, the Borghese, and the Pincian knew the strangely assorted pair. All Rome soon knew of the little coterie at Melville's home which now embraced the honest-hearted Hatton,—that accomplished scribe, Forrest Grimes,—and the energetic Vice Consul.

The absence of the whole American official circle from Mr. Rawdon Clark's superb feast at the Hotel Costanzi had convulsed the three distinct circles of American Roman society, the mansion and villa people,—the students and pension boarders—and the feverish tourist guests of the Hotels.

And, yet, in the artistic circles, the shining face of Mrs. Myra Brandon was in evidence. The loudly heralded purchase of Mr. Rawdon Clark's third acquisition, "Regulus Before the Roman Senate," had been duly advertised in the "Phila-

delphia Mail," which estimable journal also exploited the preliminary plans of the Honorable Rawdon Clark's marble palace, "soon to rise upon the banks of the Schuylkill."

There was a quiet content in the Eveless Paradise on the Corso, where Frank Hatton "snatched a fearful joy" in digging away at his forthcoming book, "Modern Relics of Ancient Rome."

The honest-hearted fellow marveled greatly at the changed manner of Captain Sidney Landon. This young official had suddenly developed a strange taste for the red Consular Book and toiled, late and early, in the Consulate General, working till the wee sma' hours upon his comprehensive review of the accounts and archives.

A dull smouldering anger burned in Signore Jacopo Maspero's bosom since he had delivered the keys of the safe and office over to Consular Clerk Morgan, now revitalized by the kindness of the young Chief.

While it was true that Captain Landon had left a card on all the American residents who boasted Lares and Penates,—still the society circles saw little of his handsome face.

It was true that he acted gravely as Vestryman

at the one Episcopal Church and that he had revived his boating with Charley Hollingsworth.

There were some whispered colloquies between dashing Elaine Hollingsworth, the cautious Gertrude Melville and the enraptured Consul General, now left free to soar in the artistic Empyrean.

"He's a famous fellow is Landon," remarked Arthur Melville, "and,—I hoped he would take kindly to Agnes Hawthorn.

"But," the good man sighed, "beyond our Elsie, and your two roguish cherubs, Hollingsworth—the man seems devoid of all social sympathy! Have you noticed that he only comes here when our little coterie, 'The Five Spot,' meets? He has taken to roaming alone from Ostea to Tivoli, from Palestrina to Frascati."

"Has he no Egeria—this all too romantic young Numa Pompilius?" demanded Charley Hollingsworth, who was the leading spirit in the Flirting Club known as "the Devil's own."

"Don't be a goose, Charley," imperiously cried his wife. "There's Agnes Hawthorn, the handsomest woman in Europe to-day,—why he has only left a formal duty card upon her at the Costanzi!"

"By the way," murmured the silenced Hollingsworth, pulling his long yellow mustache nervously, "the American Club fellows are betting two to one on this cold-hearted fellow Clark marrying your peerless Agnes! He's an insufferable cad and so already assumes open airs of proprietorship."

Gertrude Melville's pretty lips curled in an undisguised sneer. "That oaf—that promoted foreman,—marry Agnes—never! Agnes in her own quiet way is as proud and distant as Landon—," the little queen checked herself with a resolute prediction.

"She never will enter Rawdon Clark's marble palace! The whole siege is kept up by those stuffy Brandons. I think," slowly said the dainty Gertrude, "that Captain Landon is only fighting with his stubborn pride about going back into the army!

"Next month, General Hatcher will be here, and—perhaps the Atwaters! They will draw him out!"

"You may be right!" mused Arthur Melville, "but he has developed a strange frenzy for work and a misanthropy unsuited to his years.

"To all that, he's the finest fellow, by all odds.

who ever entered the Consular service. I'd resign in his favor, in a moment, if his pride were not a barrier."

Gertrude Melville's beautiful brown eyes were very dreamy. She reflected that Sidney Landon's pride did not prevent him from hearing the light fall of Agnes Hawthorn's pretty feet every time that particular young goddess illumined the dark gallery of the Palazzo Vecchio.

A smile softened the curves of her rosy lips. *"Wait and hope!"* she murmured. With a quick womanly divination she had guessed the secret of the revolt of Landon's soul against the glittering barrier of wealth which fenced in the blue-eyed goddess!

And, that night, Gertrude Melville prayed "Oh! Jupiter aid us!" before her pet statue of the Goddess Fortune, and breathed a prayer that the scales would fall from two pairs of impassioned eyes.

"There is a sort of fern seed glamour in this thing," the pretty matron pouted. "They seem to be invisible to each other!"

That very night, Rawdon Clark, Esq., in a confidential talk with his visiting manager, Barker Bolton of Denver, confided to his returning busi-

ness agent his high scorn of the ex-Captain, Sidney Landon.

"That fellow has surely some hidden shady spots in his career. I know he was kicked out of the army in some way! Now, he's making trouble for friends of mine here!

"All I know is that he left the army suddenly! Spend all the money that you want to, and get me a report over here, at once. I want to down him. There's old 'Black Bill' Prindle, the Lieutenant Colonel of the Grays.

"He is in command while old man Atwater is on leave. I'll send you a letter to Mrs. Dora Prindle. She is the secret boss of the Regiment, and,—mind you,—nose the whole thing out! You can make Mrs. Prindle a handsome present in my name. They are at Fort Stanton now!"

All unconscious of the gossip provoked by his reticent avoidance of rosebud society, Sidney Landon went along unruffled on his lonely way.

In his own mind, he had resolutely thrust out the image of the lovely woman who stood so far above him on the heights of Fortune.

And yet, her softly shining eyes pursued him, as he wandered out, a week later, to think calmly

over the accumulating proofs of Signore Jacopo Maspero's hidden official delinquencies. "It will take Morgan months to trace all out," he mused, "and the Cavaliere shall have a square deal."

Landon had wandered out of the Porta San Sebastiano, leaving his carriage to await his return. The cool November air braced his spirits as he sped along the old Appian way, with that swinging stride which he had learned on the boundless prairie seas of the west.

His heart and mind were full of but one beloved theme as he paused at the little church of "Quo Vadis." "Who knows where fate, not faith,—will lead me!" he murmured, as he passed the Jewish catacombs, the Circus of Maxentius, and, then—resolutely trudged along to where the "stern round tower of other days" told of the sorrow of Crassus for Metellus' beloved daughter!

Throwing himself down in the shade he murmured, "Let my heart entomb her as a memory! Death is not the only barrier! The battlements of wealth, to-day, are stronger fences than these crumbling crenellated walls."

A slow mental torture now goaded him on in his daily life.

THE FOREMOST SCOUNDREL PITCHED OVER HEADLONG ON HIS FACE.—*Page 82.*

"I'll wait," he mused, after a half hour's introspection, "until I see dear old Miles Atwater—and Hatcher—then,—when I have set Signore Jacopo Maspero to rights, I will—ask for a change of official station,—anywhere,—anywhere!"

Around him dreamed the lonely wastes of the Campagna! There was nothing living in sight save a wretched stray buffalo! The ruined arches of the old aqueducts glared out on the lonely plain,—the silence-haunted tombs of old Romans glowed in the stark sunlight!

Suddenly the piercing scream of a woman's voice was borne down on the breeze.

The soldier sprang up, alert and ready as when the crawling scout had laid a hand on his mouth while he whispered, "Vienen los Apaches!"

"It's over there, in the hollow," he mechanically muttered, as he took a smart double time to the brow of a little hill a hundred yards away.

And, then, the fighting blood within him boiled, for, sixty yards below, a group of raffish looking fellows were pulling two helpless women out of a Victoria.

On the road beyond, the fleeing coward driver was speeding away, yelling with Italian fervor.

"I'm in luck!" thought Landon—as he drew his army revolvers, which, by chance, he had brought out to fire away the useless charges in some secluded place, where five hundred francs fine would not follow such a daring indiscretion.

"I must get nearer to make sure," he muttered, as he gazed at the group of robbers. "Some poor English tourist women, of course."

At thirty yards, he raised the heavy weapon and fired point blank at a clump of three of the brutes who had darted toward him, brandishing heavy clubs.

The foremost scoundrel pitched over headlong on his face, and then,—with a chorus of screams, the other ruffians fled, diving into the deep radial gulleys leading down toward the catacombs.

Landon never stopped to gaze at the villain lying there before him, weltering in his blood, but he dashed up to the helpless woman who had been dragged from the carriage.

The revolver dropped from his hand as he fell on his knees by the side of the senseless victim of the daring raid!

His manhood almost forsook him as he mur-

mured fondly—*"Agnes! Dead! My God! Look up! Speak to me!"*

For, pillowed on his breast lay the fair head of the goddess of the Pincian, as he roused Mrs. Montgomery with vigorous appeals for help!

Five minutes later, the coachman, returning with a rescue party of sheep herders, met the carriage slowly proceeding homeward, driven by the chance rescuer.

At a slow walk, the vehicle regained the Porta San Sebastiani.

"Here is my own carriage," whispered Landon to the pale-faced goddess. "You are now safe! I will follow in yours! Say nothing of this! I will report to the authorities. It must not be noised abroad. Mrs. Montgomery is now herself again."

"How can I repay you?" faltered Agnes.

"By never leaving Rome without due escort and in a suitable party," answered Landon.

"Besides, I am paid already! Your head has rested once upon my breast!"

And—they parted in silence—while all the way homeward the young heiress fondly looked at her limp and helpless hands! She felt his passionate kisses tingling there yet!

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE COLOSSEUM.

With the quick decision of a soldier, Landon had already framed his plan to stifle any needless gossip as to the morning's adventure long before his carriage reached the American Consulate General.

He was delighted at the womanly prudence which led Agnes Hawthorn to refuge herself with Gertrude Melville, that sagacious and undaunted matron.

As he supported the trembling beauty in scaling the two giant staircases of the old palace, the young man whispered, "Leave all to me, and,—*say nothing*. Confide only in Mrs. Melville.

"I will have *my* coachman artfully detain *yours,* until Melville can take your cowardly driver and go directly to the Minister of Police.

"There, this fellow can be detained as a witness against the wounded brigand.

"I advise you to spend the whole afternoon here

and dine later with the Consul General! In the evening, we will all escort you back to the Hotel Costanzi, and, — remember, above all — Mrs. Montgomery *must* be silenced."

Five minutes later the two American officials were on their way together to the Ministry of Justice. Landon had dismissed his own driver, a reliable fellow provided by Forrest Grimes.

The soldier was astonished at Arthur Melville's sudden energy and decision.

"We have only the journals, the clubs and the society gossip to fear, my dear Landon," remarked the Artist. "Gertrude will send out and bring down the Hollingsworths, and we will have a musical evening. You can bring up Grimes and Hatton on my informal bidding!

"I only fear one thing,—have the two coachmen been chattering with each other?"

"Certainly not," coolly answered Landon. "Remember! I had left my man behind at the San Sebastian gate, and, when the shooting occurred, —the cowardly wretch who drove the ladies was out of sight! The two men have not had a chance to exchange a single word!"

"Good!" mused the Consul General. "Then I

will have this driver fellow detained as a witness against the wounded thug.

"In this way we can control the tongue of local gossip.

"It must be done!" gravely continued Melville, "for the watchful geese whose squawking saved ancient Rome are marvels of silence compared to the glib-tongued slanderers of the modern burg. To have your name bandied with Agnes' in this, would be her social ruin. We must stifle the whole thing!"

Captain Landon bowed his head in a silent assent. Melville marveled at the look of sadness which mantled the young soldier's features.

When they drew up before the Ministry of Justice, Landon woke from a reverie and seized both his companion's hands convulsively. "You *must* do all you can, Melville, to hide this occurrence."

"You are right! No woman can be protected against the fangs of her merciless sisterhood! I could tell you of one whose heart broke under the lash of unmerited scorn—" and then Landon suddenly checked himself, noting Melville's surprised glances.

Fortunately, the carriage halted, and the obse-

quious sentinels presented arms as the American officials were received by the orderly officer.

The Consul General whispered a few words to the young Lieutenant on guard, who then courteously led the way into the Minister's reception room.

In five minutes the grave Minister was possessed of the main facts of the case and an officer followed by an orderly was clattering away to the Porta San Sebastiano for an official report.

Landon admired Melville's aplomb as the Minister, after exhausting the Consul General's brief relation, turned to himself with detailed questioning.

Abandoning the graceful Italian in which he was a Tuscan adept, Melville interjected a few French words of expostulation.

"My Dear Signor Crispiani," he began. "You must speak French to my friend, Captain Landon.

"Now, as he has not understood our colloquy, I will tell him that you desire the names of the two imperiled ladies, and, if possible, a description."

With a furtive wink to Landon, Melville slyly continued: "Of course,—busied as I was at the Consulate—I paid no attention to the two ladies,

who took a passing carriage and drove hastily away."

The astute Italian's glittering dark eyes rested inquiringly upon Landon's handsome face.

Ringing for coffee and cigarettes, the Minister proceeded to jot down a few queries.

In his own mind, he was really studying the handsome soldier's demeanor.

"If he were one of our Roman cavaliers," mused Crispiani, "it were easy to unravel the intrigue. A hot-hearted beauty,—a complacent duenna,—a little meeting outside the walls,—a jealous rival's rage.

"Bah! These English and Americans only have ice water in their veins after all!"

In his silkiest tones, Crispiani began: "Signior Landono, you, *alone,* can aid me. I have already ordered the driver to be kept apart from all other prisoners, in close detention, as an honorable witness for the state.

"But you know not the subtlety of our Italian peasants. I presume if these ladies picked up a 'voiture d'occasion,' this fellow may be one of those loafers who drive people out of the city, and, by a passing sign or a messenger sent on ahead,

assemble a few ruffians who pillage unprotected tourists.

"Your imprudent English and American ladies are traveling treasuries! Corpo de Bacco! Diamonds,—money,—jewels,—all these riches adorn them, even by day! We Italians are very poor,—and hence"—he sighed, "very prudent."

Sidney Landon had caught the drift of his official friend's warning, and he tarried long over his coffee and cigarette, before he answered. "Monsieur le Ministre will observe," he calmly began, "that I am a recent arrival,—not a man of society—and, as a soldier of the far west,—unacquainted with even the faces of the leading American residents.

"I paid no special attention to the ladies. There was no one in sight when the attack occurred, save the cowardly coachman, who had cleared the knoll before I fired at the brutes.

"I only waited an instant at the San Sebastian gate, to put the ladies into my carriage, and,—following, in the other, at a safe distance, I was only busied with detaining this fellow, whom I thought would be needed as a witness.

"The two ladies were both too badly frightened

to talk, and,—*they gave me no names.* I drove the deserted carriage myself rapidly on till we met the gend'armes and villagers going back with the strange driver.

"The ladies looked to me to be English tourists of the middle classes.

"You may hear of this later through the English Embassy. The English always make a great racket if their travelers are interfered with."

Arthur Melville sank back with a sigh of relief as he noted the effect of Landon's judicious and gentlemanly lying.

"Two to one on Landon," he mused, as he gazed on the soldier's impassive face.

Signior Crispiani touched a bell and whispered a few words to an aid, who vanished like a jack in the box.

"Of course," suavely said the Minister, "the Consul General's official guarantee of your rank and station makes your evidence all that is necessary.

"I will wait and hear what this fellow has to say —his first tissue of lies, and then merely ask you to dictate a brief statement to my secretary. You will be troubled no farther than to identify the fel-

low whom you wounded, and to swear that the shooting was done in self defense."

Landon bowed politely and studied the pictures of the royal family until Signior Crispiani's aid returned.

There was much exchange of the Italian dialect carried on by both hands and all the fingers, with added manipulations of the eyes, until, finally, the aid vanished.

Signior Crispiani resumed his fluent French, with an air of profound wisdom. "We have the fellow's name, description, cab number and so forth—one of the average handy rascals of the town. He, of course, howls 'non capisco.'

"His story is that the ladies hired him near the Teatro Apollo for a drive. Trying to make a good fare,—he took them out to the nearest of our outside 'lions,' seeking only a round twenty lire for his half day's work.

"All he will say is that one was *old*,—the other *not so old!* He classes them as 'Inglesi.'

"Of course, he stoutly denies all complicity in the attack,—and,—also, declares that he did not see the shooting! He only jumped off his box and

cleared out when the band of loafers swarmed out of the bushes."

"What will you do with him?" carelessly demanded Melville.

"He will be kept and well treated until the other fellow dies or is tried," answered Crispiani.

"I believe him innocent. I think he tells the truth," said Landon. "Allow me,"—he remarked as he handed the Minister a fifty-lire note. "Let the poor devil have this for tobacco money! After all, he brought aid back as soon as he could."

"You are very generous, Capitano," bowed the Minister.

"Ah! Here is our report from the Captain of Gendarmerie at the station near San Sebastiano."

The crafty Italian ran his eye over the prècis handed to him. Dismissing the aid with a nod, Crispiani read with a professional triumph:

"Prisoner badly wounded in shoulder,—now in prison hospital. Recognized as Giuseppe Corti,—a professional criminal wanted on other charges. Three of his party, lazzaroni, also in custody."

"Good," concluded the Minister. "Corti will get five years in the government sulphur mines,—the others for—say three years, and, on the whole

report,—we shall simply charge them with an attack as common footpads upon *you*. So we need not look further for the vanished ladies, although, their evidence would, of course, be valuable."

For half an hour the scratching of the Secretary's pen was the only sound which punctuated the Minister's questions and the carefully guarded general replies of the cautious Captain.

Finally, Crispiani presented the transcript to Captain Landon for his signature.

"You will observe, Your Excellency, that I can not, especially after a few days, identify any of the wounded man's companions," gravely said the young American.

"All easy enough, my dear friend," smilingly said the functionary. "I shall send you home in my carriage. If you would honor me now with your signature you can avoid all future appearance in court, by permitting me to send my carriage and a staff officer to the Consulate General to-morrow at such hour as you choose.

"If you will be good enough to drive down to the Hospital and identify the wounded man, then your Consulate General seal on this paper will serve as final evidence.

"I shall send for the driver, who will be detained here, later in the day, and he, for mere policy, will swear to the identity of the whole gang."

An hour later, the friends had regained the family home in the Palazzo Vecchio. It was a royal progress in the official carriage of the Minister with its liveried outriders.

Melville and Landon, closeted in the studio, discussed a bottle of Lachrymæ Christi,—while they concerted plans for the evening.

Melville's face was grave as he returned from a brief colloquy with his energetic wife. "All looks well, Landon," he cheerfully said. "Do you now go and make sure of Grimes and Hatton for the evening.

"I find that Mrs. Melville has sent Mrs. Montgomery home in our carriage and I think there can be no gossiping."

For all that, when the Captain had departed, Melville called his wife aside.

"Be careful, Gertrude," he affectionately suggested. "You know what Italian maids are. Do not let our women overhear you talking with Agnes over this romantic episode. All these Ital-

ian girls have lovers,—and the lover is the keeper of the heart secrets of the inamorata."

The Consul General fled away to his brush and a peculiarly adaptable painting light, leaving Madame Gertrude in silent blushes, for, alas,—the two snapping black-eyed maids were already magnifying in their simple hearts the artless disclosures of the hostess and her beautiful guest. The warning came too late!

There was a peculiarly joyful dinner in the Melville household on this eventful evening.

With bashful maiden wit, Miss Agnes Hawthorn had contrived to be taken in by the genial Frank Hatton, and the two Philadelphians gaily chatted of the sleepy metropolis by the beloved Schuylkill.

This gentle artifice in no wise deceived that experienced matron, Gertrude Melville, for, the pale beauty's eye would wander, in spite of her affected coldness, to rest, with a cerulean flash, upon Landon, happily sheltered under Mrs. Elaine Hollingsworth's friendly wing.

But "it was merry in hall" as Melville gracefully wrangled about art with Forrest Grimes,—

finding, to his secret glee, so many points of convenient difference.

"The very charm of Art lies in its unvarying vagueness," was the crowning dictum of the saturnine Grimes.

And Charley Hollingsworth, outrageously flirting with his hostess, was only able to escape when the ladies left the gentlemen to their wine.

Drawing Landon into a corner, he then handed the Captain an evening journal.

There, in all the exuberant romance of the "lingua Toscana," was a floridly fabulous account of the desperate battle waged with robbers on the Via Appia by the gallant Capitano Landon of the Consulate General degli Stati Uniti.

"You are famous forever, now, my boy," gaily cried the volatile Fred. But Landon, with a grave face, drew Melville aside, and the two men at once began to build additional battlements around the truth.

Hastily excusing himself, Melville sought his wife's boudoir and, after a few hasty words of conference, they decided to escape further social complication by sporting the oak.

It was with an affected gaiety that the hostess

summoned her guests to a moonlight excursion to the weirdly haunted interior of the Flavian Amphitheatre. "We will have our music later when we come home for supper," cried the dainty social tyrant.

And so the whole party sallied forth, under the experienced guidance of that Admirable Crichton, Grimes, after the men had agnostically listened to Landon's disclaimer of any heroism.

"The whole thing is a sheer exaggeration," calmly answered the Captain, as his eyes met Melville's in a renewed pledge of secrecy.

"But we demand to know who was the lady of incomparable loveliness for whom you fought?" cried Fred Hollingsworth, and then, the jester marveled to see the ashen whiteness of Agnes Hawthorn's face.

"Let us talk of something else than battle and murder," she cried, as she seized upon Hollingsworth for her cicerone of the evening. "You, sir —an old Roman,—must now personally present me to 'the glory that was Rome!' "

The deep-toned bells were beating midnight as the merry party in little duets wandered through

the vast moonlit depths of Earth's greatest human-made crater.

It had been by a prudent coup de main of Gertrude Melville that Agnes Hawthorn laid her trembling hand at last on Sidney Landon's arm. The vast walls overhung the young couple as, with a gentle craft, the grateful girl drew Landon away from the happy roysterers.

There were scores of parties dispersed around the interior, in moonlight and in shade, and the guttural German, the nasal Yankee intonation, mingled with the nervous snap of the Frenchman and the honeyed babble of the Italian.

The brooding silence had wrapped them, at last, as they threaded a gallery once devoted to passive martyrs and infuriated beasts, to buckler clashing gladiators or the merciless Roman soldiery.

"I wish you to believe in my gratitude, Captain," began the sweet-faced goddess, now melting at heart. "I do not know why you seem to have avoided us, but—"

"I tell you he will marry the girl," rang out a harsh voice near them,—and, then—a rougher one answered, with a doubtful snort:

"Why so?"

"Because Rawdon Clark owns the millions of the Elkhorn Mine!"

"Why, this Hawthorn girl is rich as a Jew!"

Landon felt the arm leaning upon his own tighten sharply as the merciless voices of the night proceeded.

"Rawdon Clark never missed a trick in his life.

"There is Philadelphia society,—and,—the Senate to conquer. With this girl's family connection, he can do both!"—but Sidney Landon only heard the agonized whisper, "Take me back to them—anywhere,—*out of here!*"

It was in silence that Landon drew the cloak closer around the girl's shivering form and hurried her away to where Mrs. Melville was now mustering the party for a return.

A chill icier than the breath of the night wind froze the young man's heart as he bowed, and sought a refuge in the second carriage.

He could only see the fair graceful head resting upon Mrs. Melville's shoulder as the first carriage moved away.

"It's a brutal outrage," the proud young soldier mused in the bitterness of his heart. "The doom of the heiress! To be hunted down by callous-

handed millionaires or to be the sport of the adventurer."

"My God, Landon," cried Forrest Grimes, at his side, "you have not come out clad only in a dress suit? Where's your cloak? This night air is deadly to strangers! Here! I'm an older Roman than you!"

But the bronzed Captain resolutely declined the offer, as he pitilessly exclaimed, "Never mind me, old boy! There is no one left to mourn for Logan!"

And, yet—a half hour later,—when the carriages drew up before the Palazzo Vecchio, Captain Landon—soldierly attentive—was the first to aid Miss Agnes Hawthorn from the carriage.

The detachment of Americans halted, in astonishment, in the arched entrance of the old mansion, where Landon, in a muffled voice,—made his adieux.

Melville turned in astonishment. *"By no means! You are to sup with us,* and,—we will have the Star Spangled Banner and all that! You have not heard Miss Hawthorn sing!"

Standing with reluctant feet on the gleaming marble stairway, the heiress turned slowly, as

Landon reiterated his apologies! The golden-haired young goddess appreciated the delicacy which would shield her from his knowledge of the brutal meshes of the fowler's nets.

She stood there, with one graceful arm extended, in a gesture half a command, half a supplication.

Suddenly there was a shriek from Gertrude Melville as Agnes Hawthorn fell heavily upon the slippery marble!

By the glimmering light of the crescent, Landon stooped and, with the skill of a trained athlete, raised the prostrate form!

Up the stairway he strode, never halting, as Melville dashed on ahead, until, passing through the frightened domestics, he had placed the moaning sufferer upon the bed in Gertrude Melville's chamber.

"Doctor Corvini!" cried Melville as he gave place to his wife, followed by the artist's wife.

"Fred is away, in the carriage, on the gallop to bring him," said Elaine Hollingsworth, as she knelt, white-faced, by the sufferer.

In the drawing room the men lingered in ex-

pectant sadness, awaiting the arrival of the great surgeon, Doctor Cesare Corvini.

It was Landon's presence of mind that brought the nearest practitioner in spectacles and dressing gown, from the other side of the square.

Arthur Melville returned from the improvised sick room to announce the "first aid" efforts of the minor practitioner and the probable gravity of the case.

"*Broken, I fear,*" the Consul General murmured in answer to the mute inquiries of the haggard eyes fixed upon his anxious face. "She has been given an opiate!"

Two hours later the coterie separated, after knowing Doctor Corvini's work done.

"A bad compound fracture of the right ankle, gentlemen," said the old Professor, as he dismissed the visitors.

"Miss Hawthorn will see little of our Roman season, until carnival time. As for moving her,—*it is simply impossible.* Thank Heaven, she is in a household offering every facility. The ankle will go into a plaster cast to-morrow morning."

Sadly enough, Grimes, Hatton and the dejected

Landon betook themselves through the gloomy streets to the Eveless Paradise.

There, even at three o'clock, the reception room blazed with light. All the members of the informal club were awaiting the return of the hero of the journalistic sensation of the evening.

"You are the most talked-of man in Rome to-night, Landon," gaily cried Wilson Waddingham, the jolly English attaché. "The great thing is, —'dove la Donna?' "

But, sadly enough, the three friends repulsed all the questioners, wearily hearing that the clubs and salons were ringing with the wildest rumors.

"Damn the Italian newspapers!" growled Captain Landon, as he stalked away shivering to his fireless room.

"I want you fellows all to understand that my lips are silent on the whole occurrence!"

"You had better keep out of the salons and clubs, then," kindly answered the Briton, "for,— Robert Brandon and the all-compelling Mrs. Myra have already taken the affair in tow. *It's the sensation of the hour!"*

The three friends had already agreed to a strict

silence upon the embarrassing accident of the beautiful heiress.

"Clouds everywhere," murmured Landon. "My life lies darkly before me," he sighed, as he threw himself half dressed upon his bed, and fell asleep, with unaccustomed rigors of crawling chills racking his frame.

Down below on the "causerie," Forrest Grimes was grumbling over a hot grog at Landon's reckless exposure of his health. "You fellows know what it is for a man to linger a couple of hours in that old death trap,—the Colosseum,—a man only clad in a light dress suit.

"I fear Landon may hear from our insidious enemy—the dismal Roman fever. I pray to God not—but I fear it!"

Up in the Palazzo Vecchio two devoted women watched over the moaning sufferer, while their husbands gloomily exchanged a good-night.

Charley Hollingsworth charged himself with an early morning visit to Mrs. Montgomery, and agreed to convey Miss Hawthorn's companion down for general instructions.

"I'll have Elaine watch over the dear old lady at the Hotel Costanzi," cheerily cried the good fel-

low, "and see that the simple old soul is neither robbed nor carried off by some scandal monger."

It was a gloomy ending of the day which had promised so fairly to the bright-hearted American coterie.

CHAPTER V.

MR. RAWDON CLARK TAKES A HAND IN THE GAME OF HEARTS.

Vice Consul General Landon awoke to a day of unusual responsibilities with an aching head, and strange languorous shivers creeping over his still tired-out body.

When he joined the jolly coterie in the breakfast room it was already ten o'clock and yet the members of the informal club were lingering over the newspapers.

With a resolute denial, the soldier waved away the sheaf of papers presented to him.

He silently drank his morning coffee, and then drew Forrest Grimes and Frank Hatton out of the quizzing circle.

"I shall go up to the Consulate," he said to his

friends as they took their constitutional down the Corso. "I will try and relieve Melville as much as I can. This affair of last night will upset his household for some time.

"Favor me with quieting all this row about the bandit episode and all that. I must seal my lips, and you know I hate notoriety of all kinds."

"Landon, my dear boy," affectionately said the veteran Grimes. "I wish you to go and see Doctor Corvini. *See him to-day!* Have him tone you up a little.

"For, never again must you tempt life and death as you did last evening in braving the poisonous night air of 'Rome.'"

"All right," wearily answered the Captain, as he hastened away abruptly, for Mr. Robert Brandon, bustling and officious, was booming down upon them, evidently gossip mad.

The offices of the Consul General were filled with an augmented crowd as Landon entered, finding the young secretary, Morgan, the center of a knot of eager questioners.

Gravely replying to Signore Maspero's overdone bow of official obsequiousness, Landon silently addressed himself to his letters.

He tossed them in his desk after a hasty glance. "So dear old Rufus Hatcher will be here in three days," he mused as he sought the private apartments of the Consul General.

"I wish I could escape the dear old General," uneasily ruminated Landon. "For he will put the Army matter at me roughly, in his kind old stormy way!"

The brutal comments of the unknown babblers in the Colosseum recalled Rawdon Clark's persistent chase of the fair young orphan.

"I will face Hatcher—and,—then,—get out of here," grimly decided the young man. "I can not bear to see the end of this cold-hearted marking down of that sweet orphaned girl."

Captain Landon's utmost courtesy was soon tested in resisting the flustering queries of Mrs. Myra Brandon, bustling down the long corridor and coming into the Consular office in a towering rage.

"Perhaps *you* can tell me, Captain Landon, why I am denied access to my young relative, Miss Hawthorn. I hear rumors of a frightful accident to her. I have just returned from the Costanzi.

Agnes' apartments are closed. I am denied a meeting with her."

With grave politeness, Captain Landon reminded the social magnifico that he was a mere stranger to the Consul General's household.

"I am merely an official, Madame,—a casual visitor to Rome. I shall probably depart soon, and my acquaintance with the Melville household is that of a mere recent hospitality.

"Surely Consul General and Mrs. Melville are the leaders of our colony, and any one is safe in their hands! Pray, excuse me. I have my official reports to make!"

With a deep bow, he passed on into the studio to receive Melville's morning report of the sufferer's condition and to concert means for wrapping the whole occurrences in a graver reticence.

"It will be weeks, my dear Landon," sighed Melville, "before dear Agnes can leave us. And, so, I depend in all things upon you.

"I shall station two servants here to keep away the noisy jackdaws.

"By the way, you are looking wretchedly. I shall send Corvini in to see you."

With the knowledge that the sufferer was in the

torturing agonies of the plaster cast operation, Landon sought the nearest florists and sent a basket of the beautiful Roman blossoms to bear his mute greetings.

And then the young man returned to his duties at the crowded reception room of the Consulate General.

The bells were clanging for noon when, from his open window, Landon saw Rawdon Clark's splendid equipage dashing up. The burly Brandon was seated in the Victoria with the hard-featured millionaire.

A premonition of trouble flashed over Landon's mind as, with a face darkened by a quiet rage, Clark strode into the room.

"I demand to see Consul General Melville," he curtly said, without even removing his hat.

Captain Landon calmly replied, "I have sole charge of all official matters, sir."

"I wish to send my card in to his personal residence," hotly followed up the visitor.

"I understand that there is illness in the family," remarked Landon, "and the servants have orders to receive all cards and to beg that Mr. Melville be excused."

"I demand to know why the flowers I sent to Miss Hawthorn have been returned," broke out Clark.

"And I wish to know why my wife was refused access to her relative," pompously threatened Brandon.

"Gentlemen," said Captain Landon, "you must seek such answers from Doctor Corvini, or address a note to Mr. Melville. I am in no way concerned with the social affairs of Mr. Melville or his guest."

"I insist," thundered Clark.

"Then, sir," said Landon, with dignity, "I can only say, in the absence of my superior, that your conduct is unwarranted, and that, as his official representative, I shall not discuss these matters. You will find that he will resent this intrusion; if he does not, then, *I will!*"

Cowed and snarling—the two men dashed out of the door, with added fuel to the flames of their ire.

It was three o'clock when Landon's strange weariness forced him to turn the office over to Mr. Morgan. "If I were not proof against small and

large ailments," he muttered, "I should fear that Grimes' prophecy was a correct one."

He reached the Eveless Paradise only to find Frank Hatton awaiting him there, with the light of battle in his eyes.

"I have just left the American Club, Sidney," began the honest scribe, "and the whole crowd of dawdlers are simply gone mad over the affair at the Cecilia Metella tomb, and this mysterious accident to Miss Hawthorn.

"Grimes sharply called two or three of them down. I'm sorry to say that they are coupling your name very freely with Miss Hawthorn's."

Captain Landon clenched his shapely fist.

"Cowards!" he muttered. "It's that cackling pair, the Brandons."

"Worse than that!" gravely answered Hatton. "That cold-hearted brute, Clark, has been driving all over town from the Hotel Costanzi—to club and hotel, swearing that he will get at the bottom of the affair. I see trouble ahead for both of us!"

"Why for you?" said Landon, now pale with anger.

"Because the scoundrel took me into the card room and demanded that I go out to the Porta San

Sebastiano, and, on carte blanche orders, write up the whole affair of the banditti, in detail.

"He has ordered me to find out the two ladies, and to interview them, as well as to feature the whole affair for the 'Mail.'

"Further, and the crowning infamy of all, he insists upon a two-column article upon the distressing accident to Miss Hawthorn—"

"And, you said?"—broke out Landon, his eyes blazing with a suddenly kindled wrath.

"I flatly refused," blurted out the manly young son of Rutgers, "when he threatened me with an instant discharge.

"I braved him with my contract, which holds the journal for a year, and then he stormed away, swearing he would have it done by others. I can not prevent the insertion of this stuff!"

"*I can,*—and, so help me God, *I will!*" cried Landon, as he gratefully grasped the brave young fellow's hand.

"I'll see Melville, my boy! He is rich and powerful! You shall be protected."

Sick at heart, Captain Landon sought his room and lay down in a deep exhaustion.

That night, while the fever crept through the

young soldier's weakened frame, in a private room at the Hotel Quirinale, Rawdon Clark plied Signore Jacopo Maspero with the choicest wines.

"Find out the whole mystery for me," the millionaire whispered. "I'll give you a year's salary if you let me know what goes on in that sick room daily. A few hundred lire notes will make the servants in the Melville household your slaves for life."

As Clark drove home after binding his infamous bargain, he chuckled over his own acuteness.

"This Italian fellow hates Landon, who lords it over him, and he will be glad for his revenge! I will have the whole circle under my secret searchlights soon!

"And *now* for the great stroke! Old General Hatcher comes soon. He is brave and frank, and yet as vain as an old turkey cock! I'll just give him a bang-up dinner and make that fool Hatton write it up,—in style! A few bottles of wine will worm out the story of how this fellow Landon left the army,—how and why!

"Then, by Heaven, I'll use the paper against him! I'll ventilate the whole story and chase him out of the Consular service.

"When he is out of the way, the Brandons must get hold of Agnes Hawthorn.

"After that, the running will be easy! Yes! I will take a hand in this little game of 'Hearts,'—a winning one!"

Signore Maspero, waiting gloatingly for the dawn, recalled how skillfully he had planted the seeds of jealousy in the ardent bosoms of Emilia and Lucia, the deft Italian maids of the Melville household.

"Ah! Bella ragazza," mused the thrifty spy, "a half of each hundred lire note shall go in my own pocket! I will play these pretty women devils off against each other.

"And, Il Signore Clark shall pay heavily for what Emilia has already told me of the sly meeting at the Cecilia Metella! I shall pay off a score to this young upstart Captain!" He strode home, humming "Piano, piano,—por mi Vendetta!"

Rawdon Clark bounded from his chair in delight the next day, when Maspero sent him a furtive message:

"The young Vice Consul General lies in a raving delirium at his rooms on the Corso. The Roman fever has him in its deadly grip. I will

have a full report of the Hawthorn bellissima for you when we meet to-night."

"Here's luck!" shouted Clark, in joy. "The fellow is weakened with his wounds! He will either die or else be laid out for three months—and I will surely have Miss Icicle melted down into Mrs. Clark long before then! *Hurrah for the fever!*"

A wave of redoubled gossip swept over the American colony, and the journals feel on with alacrity into the garbled stories which, in spite of Melville's calm denials, entangled the names of the graceful heiress and the young Captain, by whose tossing bed of pain the grave-eyed Doctor Corvini muttered, "Two to one on death! Only a miracle can save him!

"Alone,—so young,—a stranger in a far land —to die like a dog in the flower of his youth, it is hard!"

And yet, around Landon's sick bed rallied all the genuine friends of the Eveless Paradise, and the Hollingsworths and Melvilles only waited his return of reason to hale him away into their ministering hands.

Pale-faced and patient, Agnes Hawthorn, silent

in her maidenly pride, ignorant of Landon's illness, turned her face to the wall and murmured, "He does not even send a flower! Ah! that horrible jargon of the men in the Colosseum! His pride is greater than his love, or he would give me a chance to thank him for my life."

For the Doctor had bidden them all not to excite the sufferer with the news of Landon's seizure. "It might bring a fever on her! They were exposed together to the night air."

Mr. Rawdon Clark, delightedly conferring with Maspero, was in the seventh heaven of joy when General Rufus Hatcher arrived, falling headlong into the trap of the "testimonial dinner."

"What he cannot tell me, Bolton will," gleefully exclaimed Clark, as he reread a cablegram from his agent, now in America:

"Mailed letter with full particulars. Perfect success. Send you his whole story. He was forced shamefully out of the army."

The fortnight which followed the receipt of this telegram was the very busiest one of Rawdon Clark's active life.

There was a vicious sparkle in the eyes of the owner of the Elkhorn mine of Leadville.

His step was springy and his smile joyous, for the tide was bearing him bravely on.

And yet he tossed uneasily upon his pillow at night, murmuring, "I must have all the facts, then, as this army fellow is making a strong fight against death. I must find a way to chase him out of here."

He burned with impatience for the arrival of Barker Bolton's letter.

Every evening he was closeted at the Hotel Quirinale with the adroit Maspero, whose lean pockets were now beginning to be well lined.

In spite of a considerable use of backsheesh, the Italian had as yet gained no substantial victory over the crafty housemaids.

"Go ahead, use patience and plenty of money, Maspero," urged Clark. "The women must be made to talk!"

"Ah! Signore," sighed Maspero. "These Melvilles are rich; the women have good places! And they fear to lose them!"

Clark bounded to his feet in a sudden rage.

"Find out their price! They say every woman has her price! If you can unlock this mystery,

I will not spare my cash—and I will protect them —and *you!*

"Remember, Sidney Landon is your enemy. If he ever recovers and is made Consul General,—*out you go!* You know that he hates you!"

"Yes; and *you* shall know all! *I* will have my revenge! Wait but another week!"

Fortune had singularly favored Rawdon Clark's sinister designs. For, Mrs. Myra Brandon's emotional letters praying "for access to her darling" supplemented Miss Hawthorn's very natural desire to return to the Hotel Costanzi.

And these letters of Clark's loquacious ally had made plain to her the fact of Landon's serious illness.

With womanly directness, Agnes Hawthorn secretly questioned Doctor Cesare Corvini, who sighed as he replied, *"It is but too true!* Captain Landon must be removed soon from his damp rooms on the Corso, either to the hill here, or else to a Hospital. He is too weak to be moved away to the Riviera! His mind is still wandering, and he seems friendless and alone."

That very evening, a council of war between Mrs. Melville, Mrs. Hollingsworth and the heiress

led to the instant translation of Miss Agnes to the Costanzi, at which palatial oasis Mrs. Myra Brandon, with outspread arms, swooped down upon the helpless girl.

As the days ran on, the burly frame of Robert Brandon haunted the Costanzi.

Mr. Rawdon Clark's floral offerings and daily carte de visite, with Mrs. Myra's artful approaches paved the way for the later wooing which was now the millionaire's only object in life.

"She will open every door for me at home," he chuckled, while honest Frank Hatton's blood boiled to read the syndicated social "relations" artfully padded out, and published, broadcast, in America, hinting with all too transparent vagueness at the "approaching nuptials" of the western Crœsus with the "famed American beauty."

"Thank God, poor Landon can not read this slush," muttered Hatton, who now divided the post of honor at Landon's bedside, with all his loyal comrades of the Eveless Paradise.

Knowing Arthur Melville's thoroughbred nature,—Hatton was not astonished when Doctor Cesare Corvini, with the Consul General and a watchful staff, cautiously removed the fever-

stricken man to the special apartments in the Palazzo Vecchio, where the Melvilles and Hollingsworths—a brave Samaritan quartette—took charge of Landon's fight for life.

Little Rose in Bloom, Miss Elsie, had been duly sent away to Tivoli, and in the long December days,—Gertrude Melville and Elaine Hollingsworth watched the sick man by whose bedside a sweet-faced Sister of Charity sat, ever a guardian angel.

Down at the Eveless Paradise, Forrest Grimes and Frank Hatton gloomily conferred in impatient indignation.

For persistent rumors, derogatory and disgraceful to Landon, were now floating through club and salon, and agitating the American colony.

"If I could only trace these things directly to Clark, I would go and cowhide him," growled Grimes, "but, by Heavens, we must wait and bide our time!"

Hatton gloomily shook his head. There were flying stories of Landon's impending removal,and hints that the shooting on the Via Appia amounted to a cruel intended murder.

The Roman authorities had artfully hushed up

all press comment, and slanderous tongues began to connect the affair with some disgraceful social intrigue.

"Now, Grimes," said Hatton, "it would be just like this fellow Maspero to try and blacken Landon's name! We must wait for clearer skies and happier days! For God's sake, hold your hand off Clark as yet!"

Mr. Rawdon Clark's brilliant social welcome of the game old fire-eater, General Rufus Hatcher, had been delayed by the bold warrior falling into the hospitable clutches of Consul Swasey at Nice.

But, the astute Clark had rallied the whole Brandon-led faction of Rome. The banquet-day was arranged, with a reception and soiree dansante.

Upon the Committee of Arrangements the princely host had judiciously omitted the names of the Minister Resident and the Consul General.

"*Tit for tat,*" growled Clark. "I will even up matters with these local tin gods."

He was all dressed ready to take the train and run up to Florence when Jacopo Maspero, with well affected excitement, hurriedly sought him out.

"Excellenza," whispered the sly Italian. "I

have at last brought the women to the talking point. They know the whole affair—but, *it is a matter of ten thousand lire.*"

"Come to the bank with me," joyfully cried Clark. "There is no time to lose. I hear this fellow is beginning to convalesce, and I don't want General Hatcher to meet him until I have got the whole story of his leaving the army out of the old soldier."

In half an hour, Maspero stole away with ten one-thousand lire notes in his pocket, leaving Clark, open-eyed in wonder, over a letter found waiting at the bank, with Mr. Barker Bolton's secret report.

"You shall know all on your return," cried Maspero. *"I stake my life upon it."*

All that afternoon, while Rawdon Clark lay back in his luxurious first-class compartment, he mused over the disclosures of Bolton's letter. He had read it over and over again, with a sense of delicious power.

"So, the gallant Captain left the army for the army's good! He is a sly one! When I get to Florence, I must cable to Bolton."

"Trust to a woman's desire for vengeance!"

Clark laughed, with a triumphant delight as he thought of how Mrs. Dora Prindle, in far-off Colorado, had fallen into Bolton's artfully set trap.

"I suppose that this young Landon was the regimental lady killer?" mused the millionaire, "and yet, bitterly neglected old 'Black Bill' Prindle's wife.

"Wrong policy! Wrong policy for an army Lothario! Captains should be duly devoted to the wives of field officers, lest these same experienced dames may turn again and rend them!"

But, with a cold, world-worn prudence,—the crafty wooer decided that the contents of the letter must only be used later, and through a woman's hand, as a stab in the dark!

He laughed gaily, "Myra Brandon is the party to handle this bomb. It must not be hurled by my hand."

But he carefully extracted a series of names, dates and facts from the letter, copying them in his private betting book. He complacently lit a cigar, as he murmured:

"Bolton certainly got it up in good form—Dora Prindle's letter, with our names judiciously elim-

inated. It can be very neatly used in its present form."

After Rawdon Clark had telegraphed to his agent, from Florence, he gave himself up to the enthusiasm of the moment.

For, he triumphantly captured the social lion of the hour.

General Rufus Hatcher had been of real service to the great mine owners of Colorado in the past.

Indian foray, miners' strikes, popular tumults had all been met by the brave old General with unerring sagacity and bravery.

It was after a sumptuous dinner that Clark and his guest, lighting their Perfectos, dropped into a cosy chat.

Hatcher was visibly flattered at the social preparations in his honor.

With an affected carelessness, Clark brought up the various leaders of the Roman colony. He winced a bit when the old retired Cavalry General gave vent to his enthusiasm for the Melvilles.

"I can't tell you much about our officials, General," reflectively said Clark. "I keep away from them all, on principle, but I believe that they have

a young army fellow now at the Consulate General, a Captain Sidney Landon."

The old warrior brightened visibly. "One of the finest fellows I ever met,—in fact, I came here largely to see him, as well as to do Italy! I want him to take back his old rank in the army. Miles Atwater, his Colonel, has made me promise to use my influence! He was one of the very best young officers in the army!"

"I thought he was still on the active list," artfully interjected Clark, skillfully filling the General's glass.

The old soldier mournfully shook his old gray head.

"There is a mystery in Landon's leaving the service that I must try and fathom. He made a splendid reputation in our ten years' Indian wars with the Sioux and Cheyennes. I tried to get him on my staff when I commanded the Department. He would stick with his regiment.

"On the very eve of his promotion to a Majority, he suddenly jumps the Regiment, gets transferred to another Cavalry corps, then, *without a word,* in a few months pops in his resignation and leaves the service.

"It's ruin for such a man to quit his profession. Now, Atwater has prevailed on the President to appoint him on the staff, so as to get him back in the army, and then assign him to his old command! So far, he has stubbornly refused."

"Anything wrong with his record; any hidden disgrace?" questioned Clark.

"You don't know the man! He is the very soul of honor. It's a mystery. Even Atwater knows nothing!" cried Hatcher, with an ominous flash of his eyes.

"I am sorry for the young man," artfully interjected Clark. "He is lying very low with Roman fever at the Melvilles, now! No one is allowed to see him!"

"My God! I can't get to Rome too soon!" exclaimed the old General. "Tell me all you know of it?"

And so, they talked on, long into the night.

Book II
ADVERSE GALES

BOOK II.

ADVERSE GALES.

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE AMERICAN CLUB—"I WILL HAVE REVENGE!"

Rawdon Clark, with judicious tact, left the moody old General to his anxieties the next morning, for the anxious warrior had decided to push on at once to Rome, abandoning the first glimpses of Florence.

The capitalist did not fail to note that General Hatcher had telegraphed to Melville for an immediate report on Landon's condition, with orders to reply to Orvieto.

Before they reached the Eternal City, Hatcher confided his growing anxieties to his obsequious host.

"I am terribly cut up about Landon," he broke out. "You see, when a man suddenly jumps his regiment and then leaves the service, with no

apparent reason, it sets people's tongues all wagging at once. I hold that a man's duty to his command is to leave it with no cloud of mystery.

"I know that the Atwaters are coming over soon, and if Landon will not re-enter his old corps, he, at least, should thoroughly post men like Atwater and myself, his old friends, so we will be able to meet the mystery mongers. Now, if he should die,—the explanation would be lost to us all!"

"Then there *has* been unfavorable talk, General?" quietly replied the alert Clark.

"Precisely!" grumbled the old veteran; "just in proportion as we army people know each other's lives intimately,—so much more does the right exist to know all useful and proper facts of each other's lives. It's 'all for one, and one for all' in a regiment of proper tone."

"From what you say, he needs no vindication!" calmly answered Clark.

"Certainly not!" roared the old man, "but his friends are anxious to stay the tide of this damaging gossip."

It was with an adroit self effacement that Rawdon Clark turned his distinguished guest over to

the Reception Committee on their arrival at Rome.

But, Clark was inwardly disturbed when Arthur Melville, with the First Secretary of the Legation, drew the General aside for a few moments.

The guest of honor was visibly moved, as he beckoned Clark apart.

"My dear old friend," he hastily said. "You must put off the serenade and your formal welcome for a day or so! I am going down to see Landon.

"Melville tells me that he is raving with an unexpected return of the fever. When I have satisfied myself that nothing more can be done with him, I am at your service.

"As for the public dinner, that can go on as you have planned, in three days, unless Captain Landon should die, in which case you must postpone it indefinitely."

With a cold bow to the two officials, Clark communicated with his colleagues, and then the impatient soldier was driven rapidly away in the Legation carriage.

The Committee of Reception nervelessly dispersed in a general dissatisfaction.

With muttered curses, Rawdon Clark drove rapidly down the hill to his rooms, and sent a trusty messenger to summon Maspero to the Quirinal. There was no uncertain ring in the rich man's voice as he demanded a full report of the agent's dirty work.

"I think that I can satisfy you now, Eccelenza," grinned Maspero, lighting his "Cavour," with a gleam of satisfaction. "I have drawn out the whole story of the adventure on the Appian road.

"It was the bellissima, Mees' Agnes Hawthorn, who was the companion of that morning excursion.

"Of course, the old dame de compagnie, Madame Montgomery, was taken along as a sheep dog."

The veins stood out on Clark's throbbing temples as the crafty scoundrel related the vile story built up by the two maids from the overheard confidences of Gertrude Melville and the frightened girl.

The tale was the result of mean servile surmises.

"Of course, the poor devil of a peasant surprised this sly couple in their illicit lovemaking, and

then—the unlucky contadini was shot to prevent his babbling! It is only a game to win the enormous wealth of this orphan girl for these crafty Melvilles and this handsome adventurer.

"Melville, *himself*, went to Signior Crespiani and had the whole affair hushed up. You observe that the Roman journals suddenly dropped the whole subject. Now, I happen to be your good fairy in this.

"One of my college chums is Crespiani's private secretary. I have visited him, and I learn that financial oil has been deftly poured upon the troubled waters. The wounded man has been released, after a secret police examination, and sent off to some village in the Abruzzi to recuperate.

"The three poor vagabonds who were found near the spot by the frightened coachman have scuttled away out of Rome with a few francs!"

"Damnation!" cried Clark, starting up. "And so, then, all proof is lost! It was worth anything to me to fasten the truth upon these people."

"*Not so,*" smoothly rejoined Maspero. "You do not know the Italian subtlety," he proudly cried. "I traced out through my friend the poor

coachman who was held as a witness. He was released with a beggarly fifty lire for his silence.

"Of course, he fears the American Minister and the all-powerful Consul General. But he has his own ideas!

"He has looked diligently around Rome and found the fellow who drove the two ladies out on the memorable day! It was slyly done! The Capitano is a skillful Don Juan! He left his own carriage behind at the Porta San Sebastiano."

Maspero paused and poured out a glass of wine with a delightful sense of enjoyment. His enemy was under his foot at last!

The swindling official had learned from the Italian office boys of Landon and Morgan's nightly delving into the suspicious accounts.

"Diavolo!" he mused. "This man is as rich as Prince Torlonia. He will drive the Captain out of Rome for the love of this bella ragazza, and then, *my place is safe!* I might even burn up all the accounts—as if by accident."

"Maspero!" harshly cried Rawdon Clark. "I must see both these men. I must know the whole story!"

"Softly," smilingly answered Jacopo Maspero.

"Remember that we are all three Italians! You can not even talk to these men. You know not the language. They only trust me, for I have friends in the Italian courts, — wheels within wheels. I have my own revenge to work upon this military busybody!

"As for your affair,—*you* only want *the girl!* It is as you see, Signior,"—he paused impressively,—"only *a question of money!*"

"How much?" doggedly demanded Clark, glaring at the spy, now his master.

"We have not as yet fixed our price," sullenly answered Maspero, "but you will be our *first* customer! You see, there is the lady herself,—this young heiress!

"If this Capitano should die, she will be a good customer for me. If he lives, perhaps then she will be a better one!

"And—*you* must outbid them all! The two women and the coachmen are in my hands! If you interfere, then every mouth will be shut forever!

"You must be the best paymaster of all!

"Now," continued Maspero, "I will throw in something gratis.

"It was to cover up the possible discovery that Signora Melville (who has all this girl's secrets) arranged the dinner and the night visit to the Coliseo.

"Landon and Mees' Hawthorn wandered off together to arrange their stories, and there she fell and broke her ankle. She was brought home at midnight.

"But it is Melville who has smoothed the whole thing over with Crespiani! This cruel American should go to prison for shooting that poor man! Melville and his wife are greedy, and want to divide the girl's money with this starving Captain!"

"Nonsense!" cried Clark. "They are well off!"

"Bah! No one has enough money," snarled Maspero. "If he was so rich, why would he paint, —paint,—paint? And they live expensively. Why does he hold the consular place, with its small salary? For need of money!"

"You may be right, Maspero," sharply cried Clark. "Meanwhile keep all these people in line! I will think it all over! As you say, it makes some difference if this fellow is alive or dead! If he dies, you and I are well rid of him!"

"I think that he will," significantly said the spy. "I know our good old Roman fever! It burns and burns!"

"Look here," answered Clark. "Take this thousand lire and give the coachman a few hundreds! You and I will talk later!"

"So, my fair dove; my fond dove," mused Clark, as he drove away through the cool December night. *"You are now in my power!* By Heavens! You shall be my wife, and then I'll train you, *see if I don't!* I must gain the whole story of this fellow's shameful past, and chase him away from here!

"Once he is ousted, Myra Brandon shall open Agnes Hawthorn's eyes."

While he was revolving a new telegram to his agent, Barker Bolton, he felt a coldness at heart, which even his rich furred coat could not avert.

"Damn these romantic women! To run after a penniless shoulder-strapped dandy! She may not be so easy to handle after all. He has touched her fancy! I must crush him! There is no half way now! And Signior Maspero,—he's a beautiful blackmailer! I will not need him long! I'll

make a short campaign of it. Sharp and decisive!"

While Mr. Rawdon Clark was busied at the telegraph office in weaving his web around the victim-to-be, General Hatcher and Arthur Melville silently watched Sidney Landon, uneasily tossing upon his bed of pain. The hollow-eyed sufferer was now living in a dead past! His feverish lips moved incessantly, and Melville shook his head gravely.

"Do you know anything of his family!" sadly said the Consul General. "I have sealed up all his effects, jointly with Hatton. I do not even know whom to communicate with if he should die."

"I believe that he is alone in the world, poor fellow," answered the old soldier. "He is always talking of *Ethel,*—calling for *Ethel,*" said Melville; "perhaps she is a sister."

The loyal old soldier started as if he had been shot.

"*There is no such person,*" he huskily said, "as far as I know!" And then, they left the young man to fight out his battle under the saddened eyes of the watching nun.

Hatcher and Melville parted in uneasy forebodings.

"See here," broke out the veteran. "I've got this reception and dinner, and all that humbug on hand. I suppose I will have to go through with it!

"Clark is very kind and forward. When it's all over, I'll come back to you. If there's any unfavorable turn, send to me instantly and I'll break everything off! *What does Corvini say?*"

"An even chance, with Death holding a shade the stronger cards!" mournfully replied Melville. "Poor Ethel! whoever she may be!"

General Rufus Hatcher was glad to escape from the house of sickness. He dared not question himself as he was driven up to the Costanzi.

"If the Atwaters were only here, I could talk plainly to Mary! Ethel! *Ethel!* Can there be anything in this?"

For a vague suspicion had, at last, entered the old man's mind—the echo of a half-forgotten story. He roused himself as he reached his hotel, where a crowd of journalists were ready to fall upon him, notebook in hand!

"I'll not believe it," he growled. "If it was anyone but old Dora Prindle, that regimental ghoul, I might believe;" and yet, long after he was released from the interviewers, the clinging suspicions took unwelcome shapes.

"*If it was that,*" he growled, "I don't wonder that he left the army! My God! It can not be! I must find out that it was impossible!"

The Hotel Costanzi soon blazed with the splendors of General Hatcher's serenade, levee, and the gatherings of loyal Americans.

The beaming face of Mr. Rawdon Clark smiled out over the glories of that ostentatious banquet which astonished all Rome a few days later. There was but one shade upon the social triumph of the millionaire.

It was the unwelcome telegram which was handed to him while presiding over the feast, and listening to General Hatcher's naive and soldierly speech of the evening.

Clark gritted his teeth as he read that cablegram from far over the rolling green Atlantic. The words were pregnant with a bitter disappointment. They read:

"Impossible. Major Murray Raynor was killed last week in General Wilton's fight with the Nez Perce Indians. Wait your orders."

"The Devil himself fights against me," murmured Clark; and yet, after a couple of glasses of champagne, he recovered his usual calm.

"It may be just as well," mused the schemer, "for, if his guilt can not be absolutely proven from Dora Prindle's letter, his innocence never can be! But now I will have to buy in Maspero and work him for all he is worth."

As a curious experiment, before the merry guests separated, Clark carelessly approached General Hatcher.

"I see they are fighting again, out in Montana," the miner remarked. "General Wilton has had a stiff fight with the Nez Perces, and Major Murray Raynor was killed."

Hatcher started back, crying, "How do you know this? Did you know Raynor?"

"Not personally," calmly answered Clark. "I was looking for the control of a Montana copper mine, and had authorized my agent to buy out an interest of this man, and I have a cable to-

night from my man out there that he was killed a week ago! News is just in."

Rufus Hatcher dropped into a chair. "Poor Murray," he slowly said. "He was a fine soldier, as Captain in the Grays, he was Landon's commanding officer. It's a great loss to the service."

Under the Roman stars that night, Rufus Hatcher walked the gardens of the Costanzi.

"Ethel! Ethel!" he groaned. "There is now no way of finding out the truth! I dare not speak to Landon,—and even the Atwaters can not roll away the stone from the tomb. There is no one left to tell the whole truth!"

There was a ripple of sympathy in the American colony a week later, when Doctor Corvini announced the turn of the tide in the protracted illness of Captain Sidney Landon.

"Weak, but rational now; a fortnight more —with absolute seclusion, and no undue excitement, will put him far along toward the line of safety."

And so, General Hatcher, borne along in triumph by the exuberant Brandons, a led lion in the hands of the watchful Clark, was hurried on from gallery to Vatican,—from feast to revel,

—from the Catacombs to the Villa Borghese,—and only stole away for a quiet hour to the Palazzo Vecchio, where the watch over Sidney Landon was not a moment relaxed.

"*Next week, next week, my good sir,*" pleaded the suave Corvini to the impatient veteran.

There was a grand celebration at the Eveless Paradise upon the announcement of Landon's probable recovery, Forrest Grimes skillfully eliminating Clark and Brandon, presided over the banner-draped feast, whereat General Hatcher was forced to fight his battles over again, under hospitable volleys of champagne.

In all these days, the watchful capitalist had crept nearer and nearer to the avowed social intimacy of Miss Agnes Hawthorn, the veiled goddess of beauty, still chained to the chaise tongue.

Rawdon Clark well knew the effect of quiet persistence, and with a skillful propitiation of Mrs. Montgomery and the assiduous secret work of Mrs. Myra Brandon, he was at last launched as the recognized "ami de maison."

The tacit avoidance of the Brandon clique by Madame Gertrude Melville enabled Miss Haw-

thorn to treat with the two rival camps of Roman society.

But her soul's confidence was given alone to the bright-hearted Consular lady. The helpless heiress could not but see the drift of her most assiduous advisers.

Rawdon Clark's social headquarters were now the Brandon household, where the recurrent hospitalities spoke strongly of an assisting financial element.

"Panem et circenses" draws the crowd, and even General Rufus Hatcher was not proof against the seductions of the ambitious Myra.

She it was who gathered from villa and hotel —from the recurrent tourists and passing notabilities—the crowd who enjoyed the splendid feasts and receptions supported secretly by Rawdon Clark's ever open purse. The poor old soldier, harmlessly vain, accepted all this homage.

The baffled General waited wearily for Doctor Corvini to open the doors of Landon's sick room, but the gentle professional tyrant simply laid his finger on his lip, smilingly saying "Aspetto!"

Arthur Melville had relapsed again into his painting mood, now the danger was over, and he

was either buried in his studio, or else away in the hills at Tivoli with his still banished Rose in Bloom.

No one in Rome but Gertrude Melville knew of the longing solicitude with which Agnes Hawthorn waited for the end of Landon's long struggle against death.

Some mysterious feeling kept her from sharing her heart with Mrs. Montgomery, who,—simple soul—had yielded, blindfolded, to the continued seduction of Clark's flatteries, his unvarying "kindness" and the discreetly offered presents heaped upon her by that princess of picture brokers, Myra Brandon.

It was Clark's purse which was the hidden magnet drawing the simple old widow over into the camp of circumvallation which the determined Clark was fast closing around his intended bride.

Miss Hawthorn now only awaited the coming of the early spring to seek softer skies than wintry Rome, and an uneasy feeling crept into her heart; for, she could not deceive herself as to the purport of Rawdon Clark's unflagging wooing.

And yet, still chained within her winter apartment, now made into a temporary tropical bower,

she waited, heart hungry, to meet Sidney Landon and listen to the still unasked question.

Gertrude Melville was the faithful keeper of a note, written as the final successor of twenty destroyed ones, in which she conveyed to Landon her burning solicitude for his fate. "Let it be the first thing he listens to, darling, if God gives him back his reason," she said with fleeting blushes.

Fate ordained that when Sidney Landon opened his eyes to a restored mental life the delicate and lovely face of Gertrude Melville was the first one to meet his eye.

The window was open, for a fugitive day of ethereal softness was brooding upon the Eternal City,—the ilex tops were waving against the blue sky, and the gurgle of the ruined fountain below alone broke the dreamy silence.

Suddenly, from far below, was wafted up the thrilling notes of a proud military march, as the Bersaglieri Brigade swept out for a practice tour.

The soldierly instinct recalled Landon's wandering mind, he strove to raise his head, passed one thin and wasted hand over the unaccustomed beard, and then his head fell back in weakness.

It was half an hour before his feeble whisper reached Gertrude Melville's ear.

"How did I come here; *what is the matter?*"

The haggard eyes feasted long upon her beautiful face, for it seemed to him that he was in some earthly heaven, some fabled sublunary Paradise.

Then the silent nun arose from the bedside and, falling upon her knees before a little prie Dieu, thanked God for a life restored.

The week after Landon's mental reawakening showed the rapid upward sweep of Life's curve, and Gertrude Melville had penned a few words in answer to the shy, proud epistle of the anxious heiress.

"Say that I must thank her myself, for words fail me! I shall make my pilgrimage to see her."

General Rufus Hatcher, away on his flying trip to Sicily, was duly telegraphed for,—and bestirred himself to a return to Rome.

There was but one shadow upon Landon's recovery. It was at the end of the second week of convalescence, when Doctor Corvini cheerfully clapped his hands in joy.

"*Victoria,*" he cried. "In another week you

may drive out and begin to take the air under careful attendance. Miss Hawthorn, too, will reduce my list of patients, for, with the safeguard of crutches, she can soon leave her palace prison at the Costanzi."

Arthur Melville, jealously guarding Landon's private letters, was acting as a volunteer amanuensis, when he suddenly bethought him of Landon's fever ravings.

"These look to be only official letters," he said. "Can I perhaps write or cable to any of your family. You were in your fever always speaking of Ethel—" and then, the gentle-hearted artist started as a spasm of pain passed over Landon's pale face.

"Drop that name for God's sake, Melville," he groaned. "I have no family—no ties—there is no Ethel of my blood in this world!"

Melville stole away and left the soldier to battle with dark thoughts which seemed to encompass him. And a fever spasm seized the unrestful patient once more.

"Certainly, no sister"—mused Melville as he betook himself to his brushes. The only gleam of brightness in Landon's life after a few days'

mending was the cautious advent of Forrest Grimes and Frank Hatton as the advance guard of the Club of the Eveless Paradise.

They had claimed from the overjoyed Doctor Corvini the right to be the first to convey the convalescent out into the mellow sunlight. And to this, Captain Sidney Landon gladly assented. He recognized the generous self devotion with which the Melvilles had turned their house into a fever hospital for six weeks.

There, too, was little Elsie, "Rose in Bloom," pining at Tivoli for the home quarantine to be lifted.

Doctor Corvini was proud of snatching the soldier back from the jaws of death, and so, four days later, he awaited the advent of the two journalistic friends.

The first excursion was to be a brief drive in the gardens of the Villa Borghese, with a halt at the American Club, where the gathered friends of the soldier could all shake his hand.

After the arrival on the morrow of General Rufus Hatcher, the question of removing Landon for a radical change of air was to be decided in a general council.

And all went merry as a marriage bell. Landon, upborne by the strong arms of his friends, reached the carriage in safety. For two hours he drank in the strong fresh air of the woods, and there was a flush on his cheek as the carriage stopped before the American Club.

Then, while Frank Hatton betook himself to notify the waiting friends at the Eveless Paradise, Forrest Grimes watched over Landon, seated in a little refreshment room, slowly sipping a priceless flask of Johannisberger.

Suddenly Grimes sprang up, as Sidney Landon, pale as marble, strode to the door, carelessly left ajar, of the next private guest room.

The clear pitiless tones of Rawdon Clark's voice were unmistakable.

"*Yes! Poor devil!* Murray Raynor died broken-hearted. He never held his head up after a brother officer first stole his wife's heart, and then, robbed him of his honor! So he threw his life away under the Nez Percè rifles!"

Grimes held his breath, in horror at the agony on Landon's face,—when a rough voice carelessly queried, "*And, what became of the woman?*"

"Oh, the young brute cast her off to die disgraced and broken-hearted, while he sneaked out into another regiment, and then quickly resigned to escape Raynor's pistol! *I'm told he's here in Rome now!*"

There was the crash of overturned chairs as Sidney Landon dashed into the room!

Throwing his wine, glass and all, into the face of the millionaire, he cried—"Dirty, lying hound!"

Forrest Grimes sprang between the two men as Rawdon Clark yelled, "I will have his heart's blood for this!"

The veteran journalist's face was sternly set as he smote Clark's cheek with his open palm. "Take that, you slanderer! My friend is a sick man. *But, I happen to be a dead shot,* and *very much at your service.*"

Tossing his card on the table, Grimes dragged Landon from the room. With a sign to Frank Hatton, Grimes, calling the club servants, bore the now reeling Landon to his carriage.

"Take him to my rooms, Frank!" he cried. "He must not go back to Melvilles. Here, Danvers," he entreated of a friend, "go for Doctor Corvini

and bring him to my apartment! Tell him that Landon has had another relapse." For the sick man was now wildly raving.

"What's the matter here?" sternly demanded Royston, the pet of the Eveless Paradise, as Rawdon Clark and his companion strode out of their room. "Only a sick man's petulant quarrel!" gruffly said the stranger, as he dragged the furious Clark away.

But the owner of the Elkhorn was now a lion raging in his loosened wrath. *"I'll have my revenge!"* he yelled.

"You know how to get it," sternly said Forrest Grimes. "If you want it *now*,—just step around to the shooting gallery *with me!"*

When the resolute stranger had hauled Clark away, Forrest Grimes drew his startled friends aside. "Not a word of this,—upon your lives! It might ruin helpless ones here! I will look out for Mr. Rawdon Clark. He shall not be balked of a fight! Just say that I had a chance row with Clark,—*that's all!"*

Late that evening, Doctor Corvini returned to the Palazzo Vecchio, where he held a council of war with General Hatcher and the Melvilles.

"DIRTY, LYING HOUND!"—*Page 150.*

The tongue of wild rumor had been busy and even Agnes Hawthorn at the Costanzi knew of the desperate fracas between Grimes and Clark over an American society beauty. And all could easily guess the hidden name. The whole colony was agog!

But General Hatcher only shook his head in hopeless sorrow when Corvini demanded of him the history of Ethel, the unknown.

"In his whole illness he has only raved of this Ethel, and—if the shadows of the past are not lifted—this poor man may only come out of this relapse into the death in life of insanity.

"I shall put only professional attendants over him now, and then, when he can bear it, send him away as soon as possible. He can not be moved again."

Old General Hatcher's eyes were dim as he said to Melville, "I shall not leave Rome till this poor boy's fate is decided! What a sudden return of delirium! I will take up my quarters with Grimes to be near him!"

But the husband and wife, not altogether deceived by the old General's repeated denials, only gazed into each other's eyes when alone, saying,

"Who is this Ethel who has wrecked his life? Is the burden of the story one of sin or shame—this recurrent history of the past?"

CHAPTER VII.

THE INTELLIGENCE BUREAU AT WORK.

General Rufus Hatcher, taking a vigorous command of the situation at the Eveless Paradise, at once established his personal headquarters in a suite of rooms next to the indefatigable Forrest Grimes. He was in entire ignorance of the fracas which had led to the relapse of the man now most talked about in Rome.

While the startled Arthur Melville dropped his artistic life and spasmodically took up the reins of his office at a hint from Morgan, the evenings at the Palazzo Vecchio were often enlivened by Hatton and Grimes' visits.

There was a look of grim determination on Grimes' face, which showed a settled purpose. Beautiful Gertrude Melville's eyes blazed with indignation as Grimes recounted to her his most

recent social discoveries. For the two were sworn secret allies in Sidney Landon's behalf.

"There is a persistent flooding of Rome going on, with a tide of foul stories to the discredit of this poor young soldier," said the journalist. "I hear them everywhere.

"The foreign circles here are agitated over stories that Landon's banditti experience was a myth—that he wantonly shot the unarmed peasant to cover up an ugly intrigue, and that he was disgracefully forced to resign from the United States Army."

"Are any names coupled with his?" said Mrs. Melville—her cheek paling as she bent over her embroidery.

"Not that I know of," wrathfully exclaimed the writer, "but, neither Hatton nor I can get at the whole stories. They will not talk before us. Of course, Hatton is handicapped with his imperfect Italian, but I have dropped in on several coteries where the running story seemed suddenly cut off by my appearance.

"I dare not confer with General Hatcher upon these matters, for I do not wish the rash old vet-

eran to babble to Sidney Landon, as he surely would.

"Doctor Corvini says that our friend must be spared all excitement."

"Whom do you suspect of spreading these rumors?" asked the troubled Melville.

"I know of no one with whom Captain Landon has had a quarrel. Perhaps they are circulated by the friends of some aspirant for his place."

He smiled faintly as he said, "Many ambitious American residents at once begin to intrigue for diplomatic or consular rank here as soon as they strike social roots into this fertile ground.

"Every mail carries away to America some furtive and scandalous complaint of the Legation or Consulate General Officers. I only answer the Department of State that my resignation awaits the slightest intimation of the President's wish for my retirement!"

"That's the safest official life insurance," laughed Hatton. "I did at first suspect Robert Brandon, for I think that he feels that your family holds aloof from his picture jobbing salons, but even the closest watch has not caught him napping as yet.

"And, then, there's this flamboyant mining millionaire, Rawdon Clark! I wonder if the two men ever met out west; but Clark is far too prudent to betray himself!"

Mrs. Melville dropped her eyes and walked away to hide conscious blushes.

Her own womanly intuitions told her of the veiled antipathy of the Crœsus. She alone knew of the daily creeping nigher of Clark's proprietary lines about the orphaned heiress.

"It must be some mysterious hostile influence," she said. "Charley Hollingsworth has been living here nearly twenty years. His cherubs are real Romans, 'to the manner born,' and he sent his wife down yesterday to tell me the Italian and French clubs are filled with the vilest scandals against the poor Captain.

"Now, Hollingsworth has grown into the very core of the Italian life here, and *he* thinks that the active agents are local foreigners—whoever the veiled principals may be.

"He fears that Captain Landon may be entrapped in a quarrel,—or forced into a duel with some of these matchless swordsmen and then—killed while yet weak!"

"I will take care of that!" grimly replied Forrest Grimes. "He shall fight no one in Rome if I can prevent it."

The brave fellow had locked up in his own gallant heart the details of the fracas between Landon and Clark. "Thank God, no one overheard that row," he mused. "Landon seemed to catch Clark's meaning instantly! He certainly will not talk! *And they dare not!"*

Grimes smiled as he remembered Mr. Burton Wilmot's baffled rage as Clark's confidant and friend had approached him on the next day after the trouble with a pompous challenge for Landon, addressed to him as the second of the sick man.

"See here, Mr. Wilmot," Grimes had sharply answered. "I shall not, at any time, deliver your cartel to Captain Landon.

"You, as the bearer of it, know the man is raving helplessly in the delirium of a relapse of fever.

"Now, Landon only threw wine at your friend Clark, while *I struck him! I accept the whole responsibility for both insults!* You, as a responsible second, are a coward to push a challenge at a bed-ridden man! I will, however, accommo-

date *you!* I will send for my friend, Mr. Charles Hollingsworth. We will follow you and Clark out of Rome. *I insist on fighting him, first!*

"If he does not challenge *me* now—within twenty-four hours,—I will have the right to refuse any future cartel, and also to post him as a coward.

"As to *you,* I take the place of my principal. I will cheerfully go out with you and show you that I can hit a five-cent piece nine times out of ten at ten paces! After that exhibition, if you wish *to take Clark's place,*—try me on, as Landon's representative.

"In any case, if either of you breathes any slanders against that dead woman, or tries to vilify Landon, while sick, I will publicly horsewhip both of you!"

And, then—a week had gone by in silence, Grimes easily learning that Burton Wilmot had left Rome for America, "recalled by sudden business."

"No," he mused. *"It can not be Clark!* He would not dare. For he has too much to lose—to face a pistol."

The journalist was firm in this belief, for in all

the rumors the occurrence at the American Club had been strictly ignored.

Not even the honest-hearted Hatton had an idea of the scene which took place in the little private room.

So, when Forrest Grimes said, with a sigh, "We must leave it all for General Hatcher to fathom," the little coterie agreed.

"Certainly, the General is the only one to whom Captain Landon could properly unveil himself," thoughtfully remarked Mrs. Melville, "but all these slanderers will be careful to shun General Hatcher. He will not hear the damaging slanders, and then—if he goes away uninformed—as Captain Landon is himself ignorant of all, we leave our friend entirely helpless."

Her clear eyes met Grimes' steady gaze.

"*You* are the only man, Mr. Grimes, who can frankly tell the General all, for my husband's official position would prevent him so doing.

"Then, before the General's final departure, you and he can decide how much Captain Landon shall know; afterwards—Arthur can follow up all these matters and meet them at the Depart-

ment, for *there,* I apprehend, is the place where the poison is intended to injure him."

While the anxious friends reviewed the situation, at the Hotel Quirinale, Rawdon Clark conferred with his now crafty master, the secretly jubilant Maspero.

"Mark you, my man," he curtly said, "this thing may come to an open issue in two or three months, at longest.

"You now understand all my wishes. This old fool, Mrs. Montgomery, is going home in a few weeks. She has been frightened away by the stories about the Via Appia affair.

"Your friends in the Clubs have done their work well! We will have her soon off our hands!

"Then, all that I ask of these women, Emilia and Lucia, is to meet my friend, Mrs. Brandon, and to tell her the whole truth—that Miss Hawthorn was with Landon when the shooting occurred. That is all I wish Mrs. Brandon to know.

"As for the two vetturini, they can, later, tell their story to Mr. Brandon in my presence.

"*I* shall have my revenge on this young fool; *you* will have him out of the way; and *he* will fail

in his chase of the heiress. That will soon drive him out of Rome!"

Maspero's glittering black eyes rested hungrily on Clark's face. "The people are to be kept apart?" he demanded.

"Of course, *of course,*" hastily answered Clark.

"And to be paid separately—paid *well* for their work?"

"You know how I pay, you dog!" angrily cried Clark, rising in wrath.

"Basta! Count on me!" growled Maspero. "The thing is done."

He folded up a roll of notes as Clark rapidly strode away. "How he hates that Captain! What a gold mine to me! *What a fool!*

"And all for a woman who has to be trapped to get her! Corpo di Bacco! He will have a fine time to *keep* such a sly bird! *Fool!* when our ruby-hearted Italian women are here—white bosomed and open armed—waiting for the shower of gold! Such a Jupiter could choose his Danäe here among the proudest!"

But late that night Rawdon Clark labored in his splendid apartment over the "Intelligence Bureau."

"I must work quickly," he resolved. "Already Agnes Hawthorn shows a restlessness! She wishes to leave! Thank Heavens, she will wait until disembarrassed of this old Mrs. Montgomery! That leaves me a clear field! Then, with Myra Brandon ready to work upon her pride, with the old army scandal, with both Myra and her husband to arouse her fears in this Via Appia embroglio, it only leaves her the choice to give up Landon, or else,—*lose her reputation!* I am safe! Agnes Hawthorn will never dare to disclose her relatives' confidential warnings!"

After several attempts, the revengeful capitalist succeeded in producing the draft of a letter to be addressed simply "My Dear Friend."

This carefully drawn document was to bear the signature of Mrs. Dora Prindle,—and to be forwarded to the hostile wife of "Black Bill" for her personal signature.

Clark leaned back and lit a cigar, dreaming of his future Philadelphian glories.

"Yes!" he mused. "This will work. The story is well and yet vaguely told. The envelope is to be addressed directly to Mrs. Myra Bran-

don, who is not named in the body of the letter." He read a clause or two with delight.

"I have learned through Mr. Burton Wilmot of the possibility of an engagement between your beautiful niece, Miss Hawthorn, and an unworthy man, formerly of our Regiment, a trickster, and one whose social misdeeds drove him out of the army."

The capitalist read over and over Barker Bolton's explanation of Mrs. Prindle's hatred of Landon.

In the inevitable opposing cliques of regimental life, poor Landon had loyally held to the side of Colonel and Mrs. Atwater.

It seemed but natural that Lieutenant Colonel Prindle should hate the man who on the one step above debarred him from active regimental command, and his wife from queening it over the forty-seven regimental officers.

A little social frontier maneuver which had failed, the importation of Mrs. Prindle's dashing unmarried sister, with a set purpose of marrying her off to Sidney Landon, the eligible social star, was another cause of deadly personal hatred.

The fish did not bite, and both sisters hated Landon with a due acerbity.

Barker Bolton had written that Mrs. Prindle had been loud in accusation of the man who had "skipped his regiment," and now grimly pointed to Major Murray Raynor's reckless death in the fierce Nez Percè fight.

"I am ready to begin my campaign," mused Clark, "as soon as Mrs. Montgomery leaves. Old General Hatcher will be very soon out of the way. Brandon can use Bolton's letter to arouse his wife's aversion of Landon and kindle it to a bitter hatred!

"Landon, the young fool, has ignored the Brandons here, worshiping at the shrine of that finicky social lay figure, Mrs. Melville.

"Maspero's information can be divided up,—the women going to Mrs. Brandon, and the coachmen confessing to her husband. All this will frighten Agnes Hawthorn away from Rome. Landon is poor and tied down here. He can not afford to follow her! *I can,* and Mrs. Brandon can later chase on after the girl, as my secret guest and agent. And, so—I will be in at the finale, 'a sure winner, the last in the race!' "

Two weeks later, General Rufus Hatcher judged Sidney Landon to be well enough to begin the main business of his Roman visit.

He had now fortified himself with a letter from Colonel and Mrs. Atwater, whose leave was put over to the next season, by virtue of certain sporadic Indian raids calling for the immediate handling of the veteran Chief.

Loyal Forrest Grimes, loth to enter into unpleasantness, was watching his chance to confer with the General upon the continually rising tide of scandal involving both Landon's past and present.

With all the watchful loyalty of Hatton and Grimes—no straw as yet pointed to either Clark or the Brandon faction as in any way responsible for the wriggling scandals.

"By Jove!" growled Grimes. "I believe that the best thing for Landon to do would be to apply for a transfer to Vienna or Paris, or to some other continental station. There is a fatal undertow pulling against him here.

"Why, even Charley Hollingsworth tells me that the Melvilles and Miss Hawthorn have heard

many of these disgraceful stories, and they are becoming, to say the least, uneasy.

"I'll wait for another week. Landon is now gaining rapidly, and I will then bring things to a head before General Hatcher leaves for home. He can, at least, send on from the War Department such authoritative letters as will scotch the snake."

It was a pleasant spring afternoon, and General Hatcher had left Sidney Landon pleasantly sleeping, when he stole away to bring up all the arrears of his correspondence.

He sighed as he contemplated convoying home the faded Mrs. Montgomery, but who could resist that most fascinating of invalids, Miss Hawthorn, the only woman who had ever invested crutches with piquancy and grace?

General Hatcher pushed back his spectacles and dropped his big cane penholder with an impatient snort, when the butler brought him the card of "Mr. Charles Hollingsworth." Upon the turned-down corner was penciled *"Very important."*

"What the devil"—began Hatcher, but his soliloquy was cut off by the entrance of the head-

long Hollingsworth, with the light of battle in his eyes. "You must excuse me breaking in on you, General," he began, "but in an affair involving Landon's honor I could not wait!"

"Speak out," hastily cried Hatcher. *"What's up now?"*

He pointed to a seat and pushed over his cigar box. "They are the most lightly damned of all the cigars I could find in Rome! *Now, sir!"*

The undaunted Hollingsworth came to the point at once.

"You are the oldest friend, I apprehend, of Sidney Landon, and the only army officer of rank now in Italy! I come to you to aid me in solving a mystery which is taken advantage of by Landon's enemies to work his social ruin."

"What's your mystery?" roared the old veteran.

"Why did Captain Landon suddenly throw up his command—leave his regiment, transfer, and, then—suddenly quit the army?" gravely asked the visitor.

"What's that to you?" fiercely demanded Hatcher. Charley Hollingsworth kept his temper admirably.

"A great deal, General," he quietly answered, "to Landon, *himself, to you*—and, *to all his real friends here!*

"Just before his illness came on, I put his name up at the Cercle de Rome.

"The Marquis de Pallavinci, a good fellow, signed as sponsor with me, at my especial request. I was astonished that the election after the four weeks' wait, was put off through January and February.

"Here we are at March first, and the season already beginning to wane.

"To my horror and surprise, I received this morning the official notification that Captain Sidney Landon had been heavily blackballed and rejected."

General Hatcher sprang up, his face reddened with wrath. "The damned Italian curs!" he cried. "When a man is in the jaws of death to so openly insult him!"

Hollingsworth's voice was sorrowful in tone as he mechanically continued:

"Now—I started this morning to look up Pallavinci, for I was not at the election.

"I met him on his way to my house, and he was

fierce in a white heat. There was simply a storm of black balls.

"Now, Pallavinci happens to be a high-spirited fellow, a man of sterling honor, and he wants to go in, at once, and fight the whole damned club! It appears he has forced out of some of these fellows the stories which have worked this wrong.

"He will not tell me, for he is afraid that I will go and get a rapier through me in championing Landon.

"He reminded me of my duty to Elaine and my frolicsome 'cherubs.'

"But the insult to the United States is a flat one! This poor boy Landon is our Vice Consul General, as well as a representative of the army. Our Secretaries of Legation are all members of the Club! There'll be blood shed sure!

"For Pallavinci said, 'I am a bachelor! You and I have been insulted as sponsors,—I have no ties, I am a Roman, and—they insult Roman hospitality through me. Find out the truth, and I will try my hand on one or two of them.'

"So there is the whole story! I shall not go into the club again, save with Pallavinci, and—if he fights, why—*I do*,—that's all."

The two men gazed blankly in each other's eyes, while Rufus Hatcher swore an old-time Army of the Cumberland oath,—as long as an army mule train.

"Does anyone else know anything of this?" the General growled.

"I fancy that Forrest Grimes can enlighten you," sadly said Hollingsworth. "He is a man of the world, of our own world. Melville is an artistic dreamer in his little home Paradise, while Frank Hatton is an unsuspecting simple-hearted manly Christian! I thought that Grimes had told you of this trouble, *before!*"

"See here, Hollingsworth," the old veteran said, with a husky voice. "You are a game and loyal gentleman. I will go deeply into this for the honor of the army!

"I will see Grimes myself before dark, and, leaving the club matter out, will soon gain all he knows.

"To-night, I'll go into the subject with Sidney Landon. In the meantime, promise me to keep Pallavinci away from the Club!

"I will meet him at your house at breakfast to-morrow! And,—let there be no fire-eating

on *your* part, sir! You have a charming family! I am a lonely old oak! It makes no difference where I fall! *I* will look out for the honor of the Army!"

The two men separated with that convulsive grip of the hands which speaks more than the vain jingle of words with true-hearted men.

Hollingsworth's graceful form had no sooner disappeared than General Hatcher sought out Forrest Grimes, who was seated in the midst of a pyramid of sheets, his weekly syndicated review of "Roba di Roma."

For three long hours the two friends conferred, and then the story of the mysterious flood tide of gossip was given in all its details to the now maddened veteran.

Forrest Grimes, pacing his floor, with his old mahogany-colored cutty pipe in his teeth, grimly said, "And, as an additional humiliation, Mr. Rawdon Clark was duly elected a member of the Corde de Rome at this same balloting. I know that he's a cad, but I will stake my soul that there was no hand of his in this!"

Something in Grimes' voice betrayed his hidden knowledge of the fracas!

"Are you holding anything back, Grimes?" eagerly demanded the General. And then the game fellow quietly said:

"Nothing that anyone has a right to know! You must let Sidney Landon enlighten you!"

That evening, before General Hatcher opened his batteries upon Landon, he re-read the letter of Colonel Miles Atwater and the gallant hearted Mrs. Mary. He sighed as he read the lines, "Even if you can not persuade Landon to remain in the army he should re-enter it, serve a couple of years, and then go out in due form.

"I cannot reach all the low gossip here,—but, his sudden transfer, his hasty resignation afterwards and his leaving the country, have been made the basis of dark rumors. Of course, these, in their worst form, are kept away from us! Make Landon, at least, *unbosom himself!* His new regiment went into a hot campaign just as he left, and—yet,—I'll swear there is no white feather in Landon!"

With a confidence born of his own high bred sense of honor, General Hatcher, that night, seated by Landon's bed, cautiously approached the tender subject. He sheltered his real purpose

behind the generous offer of the President to reappoint Captain Landon upon the staff, and later retransfer him to the line, and the old beloved "Grays."

The old General's face was hidden behind the green lampshade under which the yellow gleams lit up Sidney Landon's wasted face, with its straggling beard of the sick room. The young soldier's face was keenly scanned by the speaker, who noted the nervous twitching of the sick man's thinned hands.

Driven on by his own earnestness, the General became slowly irritated by the negative attitude of the listener.

There was an evasiveness in Landon's manner which was foreign to the man of old, the man of whom a Commanding General had once said, "There's a soldier! See young Landon take his troop into action! He will go up to the stars yet!"

General Hatcher paused when he had fired off his official ammunition, and tossed his head in surprise as he saw Sidney Landon slowly shake his head.

There were tears stealing out under the young

soldier's closed eyelids, but his lips merely moved in whispers.

General Hatcher's heart melted as he drew out the letters of the Colonel and his beloved wife!

He read recklessly on until he was checked by the tell-tale finishing clauses. Sidney Landon feebly turned his eyes to the old General's face.

"It is impossible," he said. "I can not re-enter the army. You can thank the President for his kindly consideration! By and by, I will write to the Atwaters."

And then—all General Hatcher's solicitude for Landon's honor thrilled in his voice, as he pleaded: "Sidney! I am an old and broken man! I have neither wife nor child! You would have been the son of my heart! Tell me, at least, that you will consider this for three months! You are weak and broken now!"

The sufferer turned his head away.

"Not for a single moment!" he whispered. "When I rode past the Regimental flag of the Grays, it was for the last time!"

"Then, by Heaven, you *shall* tell me why you left the army?" the General eagerly prayed.

"For the sake of the Regiment, for my sake, for your *own* sake, Sidney, tell me!

"You are a young man, you have much to learn! Let me beg you, before I leave,—that I shall know!"

The General started up, as Captain Landon answered, his voice almost sinking into a hollow groan:

"My past life is a sealed book,—there are two graves now hiding what you would know,—and, —for good or ill, I shall go on silently to the end, —for the past is voiceless!"

The old General grasped the sufferer's hand.

"*My God! Boy! You do not know what you say!* Tell me! In your sickness you have raved incessantly of Ethel! *Who is this Ethel!*"

Landon's voice rose almost to a shriek.

"Her very memory is too sacred for my lips to profane! Let them say what they will! I will be silent! I am forced to be silent!"

"*And, so—let disgrace fall upon you?*" sharply cried the General. Landon turned his face to the wall with a sigh.

General Rufus Hatcher summoned the attendants and left the room without another word.

"Can it be true?" he muttered; but he choked off the unbidden suspicion.

General Rufus Hatcher's face was very grave as he reported at Hollingsworth's home, the next day, a half hour before Pallavinci's arrival.

Drawing his host aside, he sadly said: *"You must not let Pallavinci fight!* As for yourself,—as my countryman,—I bid you to guard your own home.

"There is some ugly mystery here! I shall leave Rome as soon as I can—and,—advise Landon *to do the same!*

"For he has locked his lips—in a stubborn folly!"

"And his reputation?" said Hollingsworth.

"He must guard that for himself, as best he can!" sadly said the old man.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS.

The week which followed Captain Landon's club blackballing was one of many fiercely foughten social battles in Rome, and many

society vehme-gerichts were held behind closed doors.

The subject of all this bitter wrangling was now hobbling around the Eveless Paradise, and faithfully attended by the golden-hearted Hatton.

Captain Landon's gloomy face brought no brightness to the joyous circle of the gathered good men and true.

He even met the unwearying General Hatcher, with a slight constraint, tacitly acknowledged by both, for, either Hatton or Grimes always seemed now to singularly happen in upon their meeting hours.

And Forrest Grimes' face was soberly overcast, for in vain he had essayed to plead with the young fever patient to reconsider his refusal to re-enter the army.

In a conference with General Hatcher, Grimes had agreed to push the matter on, but only on the basis of the favorable career reopened to the soldier.

Forrest Grimes resolutely refused to touch upon the scandals, or upon the matter of the emphatic blackballing of a high United States official.

"Either *you* or *Melville* must deal with that," resolutely said Grimes. "You two men represent the War and State Departments! I will stand by Sidney Landon, but *he* must 'dree his own weird.'"

Landon himself was astonished at the number of cartes de visite showered in upon him, pro forma!

In his ignorance of the social battle, he foolishly ascribed these visits to a general solicitude. As the Doctor still forbade his receiving guests, he was guarded by the happy chance from any unlucky disclosure.

Forrest Grimes, though revolving through all the polyglot circles of Roman society, could not, even with his keenest sagacity, touch upon the hidden machinery of this sudden social crusade.

In fact, he had even acquitted, in his mind, Rawdon Clark, who was now giving breakfasts and dinners, ad libitum, to the Roman aristocracy at the forbidden ground of the Cercle de Rome.

With all the finesse of a cautious enemy, Grimes caused Landon's name to be brought up again and again before Clark, by his own Italian loyal-hearted brothers.

The cautious plotter merely spoke gravely of the Captain's serious illness, or referred to the attacks on his past army record or official behavior in his present place with no prejudice.

Rawdon Clark was, however, laughing in his sleeve. "It's the quiet poison that does the deadly work," he smilingly resolved, and yet, his masked batteries were all now regularly in action.

Jacopo Maspero, a past master of cowardly duplicity, had taken the "unfortunate occurrence" in commission. There was no gossipy circle in Rome which did not have its busy chronique scandaleuse in which the previous slanders were nailed down with this public disgrace. For the Italian was earning his vile money—the gage of dishonor.

While a saddened coterie secretly met at Arthur Melville's drawing room to sigh over the growth of the rising storm,—Landon was all unconscious that his chief, and Grimes, General Hatcher and Hatton, even the optimistic Hollingsworth were forced to agree that Landon stubbornly would not explain his abrupt exit from the army, and,—that there was no one else who dared to leap into the daily widening breach.

It was far otherwise with Gertrude Melville and Elaine Hollingsworth.

With all the fond ardor of womanhood, they adhered to the fixed idea of some coming sunburst of explanation which would clear away all the black clouds lowering over the romantic young official.

These were halcyon days for Mrs. Myra Brandon! With an exquisite skill, she slyly rallied at the Art Bungalow all the acrid-tongued enemies of the Melville regime. The burly form of Brandon bobbed around from the American Club to the English Library,—from artists' guilds to villa coteries—and all the details of Sidney Landon's social disgrace were thus artfully sowed broadcast.

It was with a fine application of the cowardly art of backbiting that Myra Brandon made the timid Mrs. Montgomery the vehicle of carrying all these oft-repeated slanders to Agnes Hawthorn, now eagerly craving to leave Rome, and so to avoid the possibility of her name being coupled with the unfortunate Landon. The lonely girl dared not confide her secret fears to any one.

Mrs. Montgomery, deep in the mystery of marking her boxes, timidly crooned over the danger of the Via Appian adventure becoming public.

"*It would be your social ruin, my own precious darling.* To think that this young man should turn out to be such a character."

And floods of tears accentuated her forebodings.

A personal timidity, now amounting to fear, forbade the lonely heiress from confiding this news to Mrs. Melville and the loyal Elaine Hollingsworth.

For, Mrs. Brandon, a daily visitor, artfully brought those who, by their own tongues, confirmed the very worst of the floating rumors.

And, at last, pushed on by an overweening anxiety, the orphan girl questioned Rawdon Clark, whose unflagging attentions had given him the right to an almost daily admittance at the Costanzi. He seemed to be now Rome's foremost American citizen,—and decidedly the vogue —everywhere.

The capitalist was armed and ready for this welcome sign of a growing confidence.

"My dear Miss Hawthorn," he sadly said. "I never repeat boudoir gossip nor club scandals! The young man is certainly most unfortunate,—to say the least,—and, more I can not tell you!

"In your place,—I should confide alone in your worthy relative, Mrs. Brandon. She has a vast social experience. It would seem that the intimate acquaintance of Captain Landon is not desirable,—but,—after all, he is a mere minor official, and, I hear, one shortly to be removed!"

The conservative quiet of his manner lulled the girl's lingering suspicions.

And yet,—there was her still unpaid debt of gratitude,—but,—it was a social secret (their joint property), and most undesirable as to publicity!

And,—so with all a timid woman's halting indecision,—Agnes Hawthorn quietly avoided all mention of Landon's name! The tide was running strongly against his bark of Life, now weathering adverse gales!

Even General Hatcher—now anxious to quit Rome, evaded the young beauty's questions, lest his tell-tale face should betray his own heart-

wearing sorrow over Landon's seemingly pusillanimous behavior.

"A bitter disappointment,—he's not the man I took him for," sighed the old hero.

"By Jove! When I get home, I will just run over to Fort Stanton and see the Atwaters. I dare not write to them this ugly situation,—for half the letters posted in Italy are stolen for the stamps, and—the other half are opened and read to sate the gnawing curiosity of police spies, officials, and to further the perpetual warfare of the adherents of Pope or King.

"If any one can wake up Sidney Landon, it certainly will be Miles Atwater."

The General consumed boxes of cigars in a vague unrest. He feared each day some fatal confirmation of the lies.

General Rufus Hatcher was, however, loth to abandon any of his few cherished ideals. Captain Landon had been to him as the ideal rising cavalryman of the army. Hatcher spent a whole day in writing to the War Department and the President a euphemistic statement of Landon's condition.

He finished with strongly recommending that

the President kindly extend his gracious favor to Landon, and allow the matter of the reinstatement of the young soldier to be held open for another year.

The honest old soldier blushed as he wrote the closing paragraphs:

"I shall have the honor upon my return to call personally upon Your Excellency and to explain the peculiar mental and physical condition of my young friend. He has been the victim of a very severe attack of Roman fever, and is just now able to resume his official duties. Doctor Cesare Corvini, the leading specialist of Rome, who attended him, has fully explained to me the mental and moral dejection which follows on, as an aftermath, of this dreadful and weakening malady.

"I have been unable to arouse Captain Landon to a just conception of the gravity of the situation, as affecting his future career.

"He is in a state of weakness and physical inertia, following upon the inroads of disease. His honorable wounds, received while leading his troops, have greatly added to his debility."

"That is all I can do, to hold the situation

open," growled Hatcher, as he sealed the document. "The boy shall have a fair chance to reconsider, and to learn by his own experience, that the social world has some claims to a man's confidence."

Captain Sidney Landon's altered manner was not lost upon any of the keen observers now watching him, when he silently took up again his work at the Consulate General.

There seemed to be an uneasy unrest in the way that his chosen friends hovered around him at the Eveless Paradise, and, even the Melvilles forebore to break in upon the young official's proud reserve.

Before the departure of General Hatcher, the Melvilles assembled the Hollingsworths, Grimes and Hatton and the old soldier at a farewell dinner.

To the astonishment of his chief, Sidney Landon declined his invitation, though sent in a strictly formal manner.

In vain, Gertrude Melville informed her guests that Doctor Corvini had strictly forbidden all social excitement and unnecessary fatigue.

There was the shadow of a coming storm

brooding over the pleasant household in the Palazzo Vecchio.

Two of the anxious circle were not deceived by Captain Landon's perfunctory letter of regret.

Forrest Grimes had noted that Landon now avoided the American Club, and all the usual haunts of the jeunesse doreé of Rome.

"That sinister disclosure of Clark's has turned him in upon himself," mused the journalist, "and he has some reason,—a powerfully impelling one, that he does not face the music."

The absence of Miss Agnes Hawthorn from the Melville dinner did not escape the quick-eyed guests.

And Grimes, with great astonishment, also noted the anomaly of a superb dinner at the Hotel Costanzi, in honor of General Hatcher, at which the Melvilles met their secret social enemies, the Brandons, and Mr. Rawdon Clark was the second star of the evening.

A final reception and dèjeuner at the Brandons was also graced by General Hatcher, but, the Consul General and his graceful wife were conspicuously absent,—the western capitalist, how-

ever, acting as "Père d'honneur" to the superb festivity.

It was idle to deny that the absence of the Vice Consul General from all three of these functions set the ball of gossip again rolling, and with unexampled velocity.

"*Tabooed, sent to Coventry,* and, *ignored,*" soliloquized Forrest Grimes. "These public insults are his final ruin, unless he acts! Shall I tell him all? The whole story of the blackballing? Useless,—for there seems now to be no one to fight!"

Forrest Grimes wondered at the calmness with which Rawdon Clark had explained the fracas at the American Club to its managing President.

"*Who could notice the ravings of a poor fever patient?*" the suave capitalist had pityingly said. "I was breakfasting with an American partner, Mr. Burton Wilmot, when this unfortunate young man wandered in, behaving in a most incoherent manner!

"He created some little confusion, but my friend, a cool frontiersman,—and a fearless man of honor,—simply advised me to ignore the whole affair!

"I *pity* the young man, for he could not distinguish even his friends from myself and companion.

"He was only fighting shadows,—poor man,—*let it go at that!*

"You see that he now feels so much ashamed of himself, that he very wisely avoids the club! His proper place is in a sanitarium! Of course, —he merits all our compassion!"

"Clark is either a very smooth article, or else he was really innocent in that matter," mused Grimes. "I am not called on to fight for the whole Army, but,—I will watch over poor Landon! If there is to be any more of this 'dead, cold, open cut,' I shall certainly ask Hatton to join me in begging Landon to leave Rome at once! No one can fight the whole world 'en Don Quixote!' That day has passed forever!"

It was on the eve of General Rufus Hatcher's departure that the Minister Resident gave his formal dinner of farewell to the national hero, who was now gladly turning his face homeward.

While every American of note in Rome was honored with an invitation, Forrest Grimes, with Hatton, both guests, could not control their

astonishment at the absence of Captain Landon. Melville, silent and distrait, merely filled a lay figure's place at the Minister's splendid entertainment. Landon determinedly kept his rooms and avoided all social appearances without exception.

There were those who marveled much to see the third place of honor filled by Rawdon Clark, Esq., of the Elkhorn Mine.

But the more worldly-wise of the guests reflected that—after all—the Minister Resident was dependent upon the home politicians for his transitory glory. His tenure of office was the slender single hair of political favor, and the Presidential guillotine axe was always suspended over his head.

What could be denied to the mighty Crœsus Clark, the reputed owner of two western senators as well as the richest carbonate mine in Leadville?

What might not be done by Rawdon Clark, Esq., directing owner of the "Philadelphia Mail," which staid old journal was now popularly known as the "Philadelphia Flail." He was a man of power "in esse" and "in posse."

The tactful wife of the Minister had duly as-

signed the now convalescent beauty, Agnes Hawthorn, to the prandial care of Clark, at her astute husband's direction.

"We must cultivate that man, Maria," he confided. "He is a pyramid of political weight; he is booked for the U. S. Senate, and my promotion lies in his power!

"From Colorado, he could at once enter the Senate, double banked. He carries both the other men in his pocket! But his social position is higher! He even dreams of conquering a share of the Keystone State's representation! He will soon be a political Warwick! So, give him all your spare moments, and distinguish him as far as possible."

It was the evening of Clark's social culmination in Rome as a bright particular star, for his lavish hospitalities at the Cercle de Rome had hypnotized the foreigners.

Mrs. Myra Brandon's "open door" policy had drawn the floating Americans, and, now, the Minister Resident openly crowned him as the "first citizen" of the social constituency.

Champagne and Roman punch made General Rufus Hatcher very communicative as he drove

home that night in the splendidly appointed carriage of the wily Clark, who was to convoy the departing guest as far as Florence.

With a subtle flattery, Clark had retained a private car as far as Florence for the General and Mrs. Montgomery.

On this evening drive home, the General confessed to a few thousands of dollars of hard won savings, and asked the capitalist's advice as to a "turn in stocks."

The dancing light of joy glittered in Clark's wary eyes, as he confidentially said: "I will give you a letter to my New York broker. I will see that you are put into a deal that will double it! *No! No thanks! General! Leave all to me!* I will give you my own guarantee of honor against loss!"

Disarmed by all this "brotherly love," the old General opened his heart when Clark asked him if he could be of any service to him in Rome.

"I shall remain on the Continent for another year," complacently said Clark.

The story of Sidney Landon easily oozed out of the old veteran's addled mind. Leaning back

in a delicious reverie, Rawdon Clark listened with a deferential interest.

"Trust to me to keep an eye on this young man," he purred, "*for your sake!* You can write to me, after you reach Washington, just how the President views his case!"

Rufus Hatcher went to his rest somewhat shamefaced that his adieu to Sidney Landon could be only for an hour in the morning before the departure of the noon train. He felt they had grown sadly apart. He burned to demand flatly of the Minister or Melville the reason of Landon's absence from the fête par excellence.

But he was forced to grumble himself to sleep, while Rawdon Clark, still in his dress suit,—drank to his own future glories in a little private seance in his own rooms.

"Capital," he laughed. "I can now have both Allerton and Bostwick flatly oppose Landon's re-entry to the army. These powerful Senators can overweigh the simple old soldier! *What a fool a man is to tell all he knows!*"

Clark glanced at his table loaded down with invitations!

"I have snowed this young jackanapes under,"

he mused; "and, the fool stands off in his stupid pride, now, and is playing right into my hand!"

He well knew from Mrs. Montgomery that a simple carte de ceremonie had been Sidney Landon's only social approach upon Miss Agnes Hawthorn, now thoroughly afraid of some gossipy disclosure.

"The Minister's dinner was a ticklish corner," laughed Clark.

He chuckled over his own acuteness at sending Mrs. Brandon to frighten the Minister's timid wife with stories of Landon's frightful "*Epileptic*" attack at the club.

"*Such a man is positively dangerous,* my *dear,*" said Myra Brandon, as she sailed away in proud swings like a Spanish galleon.

But the poison deftly insinuated into Minister Van Buren Hartford's mind had done its work! Rawdon Clark builded well when he lost five thousand francs at baccarat to the Marquis di Santa Lucia, at the Cercle de Rome. A friendly staking of this same noble later made the impecunious Italian as soft as wax in the schemer's hands. And so, Santa Lucia had, under the guise of an official confidence, filled the Minister's

ears with the story of Landon's blackballing and a resume of all the rolled up Roman scandals.

"There is my friend Rawdon Clark," he said; "he knows that this man was kicked out of the American army, only his generous, noble soul will not let him blacken a countryman."

As Santa Lucia really held a minor place in the Foreign office, the startled Minister at once mentally crossed Landon off his social books forever!

"Remember, mon cher Ministre," silkily said the Marquis, "this is all in strict confidence,—*behind closed doors!* It is only to shield you that I violate a club rule,—never to talk of our inner life."

The parting between General Hatcher and Sidney Landon was one of mutual constraint and relief. The Captain awaited his estranged friend in his own rooms at the Eveless Paradise. Landon was but slowly groping toward the light as regarded his altered social position. There were few cards and no invitations seeking him *now,* and he awoke at last with a start to realize that Doctor Corvini, the faithful Morgan, and Grimes and Hatton now comprised his entire active social list.

The singular avoidance of the Melvilles by Miss Hawthorn had also forced itself upon his inner consciousness, for he knew of her social reappearance, a thing of beauty and of added joy everywhere in Rome. He was aware also of her invitation to Myra Brandon's dearest friend, Mrs. Agatha Waring, a prononceè young widow, to share her splendid solitude.

General Hatcher's manly heart smote him as he saw the pale face of the young soldier, now shaven, but only to display his sunken cheeks!

"Sidney!" he cried. "Will you not give me your confidence?"

"*There is nothing to give, General!*" proudly answered Landon, turning his head away to hide a sudden emotion.

"I am thinking of soon leaving Rome."

"See here," pleaded the kindly old Hatcher, with a quiver in his voice. "You are bent now upon ruining your second career! Recall your foolish words! Let me cable to you your army appointment! *Come back to us, my boy!*"

"General!" sadly said the agitated Captain, "My honor, my peace of mind, and—the honor of others—forbids!"

"*Then,* all I say is," cried the excited veteran, dashing his card down upon the table, "when you are at the end of your rope, you'll find me at the Army and Navy Club, Washington."

The young man rose and stood in a respectful salute, as the old warrior hurried away to hide the gathering tears.

"*I believe that the boy is mad,*" he testily cried, as he drove away to join Mrs. Montgomery at the Hotel Costanzi.

Captain Landon slowly dressed, and then made his way to the Consulate General. He merely nodded to Grimes and Hatton, who were watching him, hidden in a corner of the smoking room.

When Landon's tall form disappeared, Grimes resolutely said: "Now that Hatcher is gone, we must dip in our oars! Landon must face the music at once, or else leave Rome! And, *if he stays,*—we must tell him all from the first to the last!"

Frank Hatton bowed his head in a sorrowful silence. He had been made aware of Rawdon Clark's changed manner in the last month, a patient urbanity, a deferential courtesy now marked his employer's newer moods.

The magnate had even spoken of Sidney Landon with a cordial sympathy.

"I suppose the blonde goddess has decided in Clark's favor!" mused Hatton. "The Crœsus is to be the happy man.

"Yes!" gloomily said Grimes. "Landon's career in Rome is ruined! The women, too, have all turned their thumbs down! Vae Victis! He has been tried and condemned unheard behind closed doors! And, money has won its usual victory—a golden walkover!"

While they were speaking, Vice Consul General Landon, entering his office, was startled by a sudden recontre with the United States Minister Resident.

The pompous diplomat was wending his way down the long hall of the Palazzo Vecchio to the private rooms of the Chief.

Utterly ignorant of the Minister's secret decree of social banishment, Landon courteously spoke and offered his hand "en Americain."

He remained rooted to the spot as the Minister, calmly ignoring both outstretched hand and polite greeting,—passed on in silence, with a frozen stare.

A ferocious gleam of joy lit up Jacopo Maspero's eyes as he touched Landon's arm, and, with mock humility, handed him his letters.

Landon mechanically tore open the first, and read it, with an increasing wonder!

It was postmarked Cairo, Egypt, and bore the chiffre of the Egyptian War Department! The young man's eyes flashed out with the old soldier light again!

"*Thank God!* I shall have a chance to die by the spears of El Mahdi's fanatics!"

He realized that the Minister's person was sacred,—and, an instant leave of absence was his only possible safeguard!

"I'll cable my acceptance at once!" he mused, while within Melville's room he was being judged behind closed doors.

CHAPTER IX.

AT THE FOUNTAIN OF TREVI.

While Captain Sidney Landon awaited the departure of the highest American representative in Italy, he mechanically busied himself with the

arrangement of the few private papers which were locked in his personal desk.

Suddenly he caught Maspero's glances resting upon him, in an ill-disguised triumph.

And at the sight of his enemy's glee his old fighting spirit returned.

He drew the faithful Morgan aside into the little consultation room.

"Edwin," he said, with a voice trembling with rage. "Pray go into Mr. Melville's studio and tell him that I ask for a few words with him, here, *instantly*, on an important matter which must be laid before His Excellency before he leaves the building!"

The faithful secretary hastened away muttering "*What's in the wind?* Landon looks as if he had received his own death sentence!"

While awaiting the arrival of his Chief, Captain Landon began to feel the full force of the open and avowed insult offered him before the man whose now totally experted accounts proved him to be a tricky scoundrel.

"I must not abandon Morgan to Signior Maspero's rancor," he muttered. "The mills of the

gods shall grind him slowly, perhaps,—but,—all in due time!"

When Morgan returned, Sidney Landon whispered: "*Reserve to-night for me!* Come and dine with me, and spend the whole evening. I leave the office to stay forever, but, your work must go on! This Italian hound must finally be brought to bay!"

As the young man left the consultation room, Arthur Melville hastily entered with his face a curious study of sorrow and indecision.

He had vainly sought for the particular platitude to cover the "mauvais quart d'heure." The first glance at Landon told him that some random shaft had gone home.

Captain Landon bowed with all the formality of a duellist upon the field of honor. He extended a sheet of dispatch paper upon which a few lines had been hastily traced.

"Will you favor me with asking His Excellency to approve this leave of absence for one month?" coldly remarked Landon.

"The State Department usually acts upon these matters!" murmured the astonished Melville.

"*There is no time to wait,*" calmly rejoined

Landon, his face now as tensely drawn as a young Pawnee's upon his first war path.

"I shall cable my formal resignation through you, the very moment that you have approved this and Minister Hartford has signed it."

With a perfunctory sigh, the irresolute Melville turned, and quickly vanished in the direction of the studio. The soldier walked into the main office room.

In five minutes his few belongings were all locked up in his dispatch box.

Calling the office messenger, he sent the lad away to the Eveless Paradise with his simple archives.

With a whispered direction to Morgan to take charge of the office until the Consul General should give his own personal directions, the young man, picking up his hat, stick and top coat, "stood at attention" when the fluttered Consul General joined him in the private room.

He extended his hand for the paper without a word, read the signatures, and then bowed gravely.

"I will now cable my resignation to the State Department, sir, and ask that my successor be

instantly appointed. I only take this month's leave of absence so as to be enabled to sign any papers covering my official career. Mr. Morgan alone will have my address."

Then, without turning his head, he strode out into the gloomy hallway of the Palazzo Vecchio.

There he encountered Miss Rose in Bloom, departing for her morning walk.

"My little playmate," he cried, touched with some gentle emotion.

He lifted the rosebud child, kissed her fair and innocent face, and then slowly descended the stairs.

As he stood in the shadow of the great gateway, a hand was laid upon his arm. Landon almost fiercely eyed Arthur Melville.

"*Pray, not one word,*" he said. "I can never forget your kindness to the stranger within your gates! I only hope, *for your own sake*, that you will awake to the grave responsibilities of your office. I go back to my rooms! I shall leave Rome, probably forever, to-morrow at midnight. You can meet me as a private citizen down there on the Corso!"

Arthur Melville was left speechless, for vain

words had failed him. He saw the agony on the young soldier's face.

There was the sudden frou frou of silken skirts and Gertrude Melville stood beside them, on the very spot where Agnes Hawthorn had fallen on the luckless night of the visit to the Colosseum.

All the mute entreaty of a woman's awakened soul in her shining eyes! She gently drew Captain Landon aside!

"Morgan has told me," she softly said, "that you are to leave us forever! *Have you a right to go without one word to me?* You need a champion, *now!* Remember, too, that you have broken our bread!

"Promise me that you will not leave Rome without seeing me!"

Her gentle bosom was heaving with some unexplained thrill of suddenly evoked sympathy for the friendless man.

Captain Landon stood there silent and irresolute, while Arthur Melville had hastily sought the other end of the loggia.

"I will never re-enter the Palazzo Vecchio," sadly said Landon. "The shadow of some great wrong broods over me! You can not come to

me! And,—I would not have you write! When I go—I go, as the crow flies, to far-away lands!"

"What I must say to you can not be written, and no friend could intervene," murmured Gertrude, a crimson blush stealing over her pale cheeks.

"When do you go?" she faltered.

"I take the midnight train to-morrow for Genoa," the soldier said. "Best that we do not meet! You can do nothing for me! 'Contre la force, il ny a pas de resistance!' It is the work of the Fates! I am doomed to suffer in silence!"

The beautiful woman was reading his shadowed soul in his darkened eyes.

"Be at the Fountain of Trevi at nine to-morrow evening," she whispered. *"I must see you, if only for Agnes' sake!* You shall not leave Rome without one heart vowed to right you from these frightful scandals."

He raised his head in a proud disdain, but the gentle lady fled away, with a dainty finger on her rosy lip in a last mute command!

Sidney Landon watched her light form vanish in the gloom of the winding stair.

"May God go with you, Madonna!" he softly

said, and then strode out into the garish sunlight.

An hour later he entered his room at the Eveless Paradise, and, locking the door, threw himself down to cool his throbbing temples.

He had changed his whole life by a dozen cabled words to the War Ministry of the Khedive at Cairo, and his unconditional and immediate resignation had been duly telegraphed to the Department of State at Washington. He had burned his ships! A new field—new dangers—new adventures lay before him in the misty veiled future.

His stern pride now flamed up in his bitter, desolate heart.

"Morgan alone shall follow on my work of entrapping this Italian scoundrel! Grimes and Hatton are good fellows enough, but why should they suffer for me?

"As for this timid snob of a Minister, I suppose that my place is wanted!"

He wondered from what quarter the stab in the dark had come, for all his later social isolation now flashed over him.

"I am a free man, at any rate," he bitterly cried, as he unlocked a case and slipped a revolver

in his pocket. "God help the man who crosses my path now. I will play a lone hand against a lying world!"

His eyes rested on General Hatcher's last card of adieu flung upon the table.

"Poor dear old hero! Gallant old friend! You shall have a letter,—at least, a few lines to show that I am grateful!"

After he had written and personally mailed his acceptance of the Egyptian army commission and his formal Consular resignation at the end of the leave of absence, his mind reverted to the harmless assignation at the Fountain of Trevi.

Still in ignorance of the web of scandal deftly woven around him, he remembered Gertrude Melville's words, *"for Agnes' sake!"*

"And, she, too, has fallen off, her gratitude was short lived enough! It matters little, for I will have ample time to forget her over there in Abyssinia.

"The Soudan's sands may cover my bones and, —*I find a welcome rest forever* by the palm-fringed Nile."

Captain Landon's evil genius ruled the hour! He was still stemming adverse seas, for, while he

looked out into a dreary future,—there was a woman pacing her splendid boudoir at the Costanzi in a wild unrest of heart!

With tears and sobs,—Mrs. Montgomery had thrown herself at Agnes Hawthorn's feet and left behind her the legacy of all the artfully contrived slanders of Mrs. Dora Prindle, filtered through Barker Bolton's letters. *"The proofs,—the proofs* —they are all now on their way! You must shun this disgraced man or else pay the penalty of a blackened name! *Myra Brandon will watch over you!* Trust only to her!"

And then, breaking in upon this stormy mood, resolute Gertrude Melville,—now a secret champion,—came to warn the heiress of an unpaid debt of gratitude.

"Landon is leaving Rome forever,—poor,—friendless,—disheartened, and with not a single champion left behind! Even Morgan does not know where he will recklessly cast himself away, —he has parted in coldness and estrangement with General Hatcher,—the old veteran himself charged me to watch over him!

"And,—the Minister has socially crushed him!

"I know not why—for—Arthur,—my hus-

band,—for the first time in our marriage,—has plead a sworn secrecy!

"I owe to Captain Landon nothing but a woman's loyal faith—but, Agnes,—*you owe him the unpaid debt of a life preserved!*"

The two fair women clasped heart to heart, mingled their tears, as the heiress sadly recalled her own pledged secrecy.

But, when Gertrude Melville left her orphaned friend, there had also been given to her the pledge of a sisterly aid in the masquerade of the Fountain of Trevi.

"I come to you for help," pleaded Gertrude. "To whom else could I come? No one must ever know! You must be alone the guardian of my secret!

"For Landon shall know all his danger, and,—you can help me in this and pay your debt in this wise! *I dare trust to no one else!* You can be draped beyond all recognition!"

With a trembling heart, Agnes Hawthorn, smiling through her tears, consented to brave the night shadows of Rome.

It needed all the stony apathy of Landon's soldier nature to control himself when Forrest

Grimes and Frank Hatton burst in upon his rapid packing.

A sudden wave of excitement seemed to have permeated the whole of the Eveless Paradise. But the military aplomb of the Captain was equal to the occasion. On Doctor Corvini's noon-day visit he had gently forced upon that quaint old savant a very handsome honorarium.

"I am going over to the Riviera for a month, my dear Doctor," he gently said.

"I have a leave of absence for thirty days. It can be extended, ad libitum,—and, so, I will slip away and say good-bye to no one!"

The gentle-minded old physician looked troubled at heart. He had learned to love his patient.

"Have you any one to look out for you there, in case of a further relapse? Ah! The tiger that Roman fever is! I shall be glad to give you a letter to my dear colleague, Doctor Montaverde!"

Captain Landon's eyes glistened, for the old man had been untiring.

"There is Consul Swasey, a lifelong friend of my father's—the American Consul at Nice.

"All my letters will go to him! And, so,—I

can consult you by letter, and I shall still feel near to you! It is best that I should go at once. I need a change from here.

"I have threaded every gallery,—dreamed in every church,—climbed every historic mountain and," he faintly laughed, "I could gain a living as a Roman guide, for from the depths of the Catacombs,—to the ball on St. Peter's,—from the dungeons of San Angelo, to the summit of Soracte,—I have filled myself with the mournful atmosphere of the Eternal City.

"Perhaps, Monte Carlo and the rattling fun of Nice may brighten me. There are always some American war ships at Villefranche, stationed as 'near the ladies' as possible!"

"Ah, my boy," sighed the old Cavaliere, who wore a dozen orders over his wasted breast, *"promise me that you will drink of the Fountain of Trevi.* Throw in a silver coin,—shut your eyes and pray to Fortuna,—then—you will surely wander back to Rome—and, remember—you will meet those who stand there beside you! *The fountain is faithful,*—it is the shrine for parted lovers! Its very waters whisper of peace and happiness!"

And, so, with a fatherly benediction, the aged Doctor left his strangely reticent patient.

It was fortunate that the two journalists fell upon the medical man and extracted his story, for, with a hollow pretense of gayety, Landon only told his two chums that he was taking a run over to the Riviera. *"You are packing everything, however!"* agnostically said Forrest Grimes.

"A good soldier is never separated from his baggage," laughed Landon. "My possessions are so few that I can not spare them! Now, seriously—" he said, with averted eyes, "I shall say good-bye to no one,—for,—my return is only a matter of time!"

Frank Hatton broke out into an unaccustomed enthusiasm. "I will rally all the fellows for a good-bye send off!"

"Pray do not, Frank!" harshly cried Landon. "I have asked Ned Morgan to come down and spend the whole evening in closing up my papers and returns! It will take us till midnight.

"To-morrow morning I close up all my business. I'd like to see both you men in the afternoon, and then I send my luggage to the station,

taking the midnight through train! Morgan claims the right to close up the little odds and ends I leave behind."

There was a long secret conference on this last evening of Landon's Roman life between Grimes and Hatton. For the sake of friendship, they decided to say nothing to the Melvilles of Landon's sudden flitting.

"I suppose there has really been an official row following Minister Hartford's ignoring the Vice Consul General about that dinner matter. It's a pretty mess as it now stands!

"But,—as to the Captain's reputation! This sudden flight will leave his name at the mercy of every coward in Rome!"

A long discussion of the whole miserable business decided the friends to jointly write to the American Consul at Nice a full statement of the whole veiled intrigues, holding nothing back!

Even the club blackballing was to be detailed in full! "We will wait to see what happens for the first fortnight," said the cautious Grimes, "and then Landon can either come back and face the whole situation, or, if he so chooses, resign and go home from Nice!

"It would only make him a victim of butchery to tell him all now! Some of these Italian sword twisters would surely kill him! He can advise, there, with dear old Swasey, a pattern gentleman of the old school."

It was two o'clock in the morning before Edwin Morgan left Sidney Landon's apartments, and Signior Jacopo Maspero, busied in an excited conference with Rawdon Clark, on the Quirinal, would have shuddered for his future had he known that Sidney Landon bore away in his luggage a full set of the tabulated proofs and calculations vouching for Maspero's ingenious rascality of years.

"I shall hold these certified copies, for a time, Morgan," said the ex-Vice Consul General. "Do you follow on and accumulate further and quiet proofs of your own!

"You will be the only man in Rome to whom Consul Swasey will give my address, and,—that —only, *as the last extremity*. He will send on all letters, but we will, with patience, be able to trace out who is behind Maspero in his villainy.

"Either some one of the rapacious Roman bankers, or a committee of the thieving shop keep-

ers and pseudo art dealers! Perhaps even Brandon uses him as a stool pigeon to draw trade to his 'art' mill!

"If forced to act, by accident, go in yourself and crush Maspero! I will not open Melville's eyes. He is a vague dreamer, the unsuspecting tool of this political Minister Resident, and, pop! —some day he will be cast out, and then, some one of Rawdon Clark's political proteges will relieve Melville! So,—only guard *your own head,* for Maspero will surely attack you—and,—whoever has been secretly 'gunning for me,' will also try to punish *you,* dear boy, for being my friend!" The two men's eyes meet in a silent pledge of lasting friendship.

"There are rumors," said Morgan, as he wrapped his cloak around him to leave, "that this millionaire, Clark, is soon to marry Miss Hawthorn and then begin his political life with supplanting Van Buren Hartford as Minister Resident! I'm told that he has even been pricing palaces, and proposes to entertain in a way to dazzle even the impoverished King Humbert!"

Edwin Morgan left without noticing the spasm of disgust which swept across Sidney Landon's

face, but the restless soldier paced his lonely rooms till the star dials hinted of morn!

Too late he felt that he had been outwitted and maligned.

"I suppose it's the old thing!" he gloomily said. "*These cursed anonymous letters!* If I could surely trace them to that stony-hearted woman fiend,—not even her bluff old husband's bravery would save her!"

In the smoking room of the Eveless Paradise Hatton and Grimes were still uneasily discussing the sudden hegira. Frank Hatton, whose robust manliness was evoked by the defenseless loneliness of Captain Landon's position, sighed as he summed up his final opinion.

"It seems half-hearted and unfriendly in us to let Landon go away in total ignorance of the underhanded fight against him!

"It has been all carried on *behind closed doors,* but it has done its work—even—to the estrangement of the Melvilles,—his dearest friends!"

Forrest Grimes sadly shook his head as he took his bed candle. "If we overwhelmed him, *now,* with a full disclosure,—there would surely be blood shed before to-morrow night! Remember,

—we may save him yet by watching his enemies in this month. It's time enough to stand by him, if he comes back to face them!"

The friends were ignorant of Sidney Landon's proud resentment of the Minister's official insult, —a grossness offered in his own office.

They knew not of the self-deception of the unhappy Landon, who had recognized in the averted faces of friends the effective work of the anonymous letters which had pursued him for years in the army—and, he,—looked far away to the veiled hand which had dealt the dastardly blow.

But the saddened man, pacing his room, in vain tried to hide the sharpest wound of all,—*Agnes Hawthorn's seeming cold indifference.*

Her beautiful face had illumined his shaded life,—his soul had leaped into a newer life,—the resurrection of Love,—when her helpless head lay upon his shoulder!

Pausing in his midnight "sentry go," he bitterly murmured, "If we stood *on even terms,*— I would face her,—right here, *with the truth!* She should have the key of the past,—*she alone!* But, her riches,—and my poverty,—have made a

gulf between us wider than the green rolling Atlantic,—the unbridged chasm of unequal station!"

Consul General Melville was keenly watched as he emerged from Captain Landon's rooms, after making his good-bye call upon the silent and stately young man on the morning of his last day in Rome.

Ignorant of the details of the Minister's open affront,—Melville felt rebuffed when Landon coldly thanked him for his offers of closing up any social or business matters left unfinished by the hasty departure.

"I leave all my affairs to Mr. Morgan," Landon stiffly said. "I am under a lifelong debt of gratitude for the kindness of yourself and Mrs. Melville in my illness.

"As to my social name and fame,—I care nothing,—for the roads which all lead to Rome,—also lead out again to that wide, wide world, in which I can find peace or strife,—rest or torment,—just as God wills!"

In answer to the Consul General's flat demand, Landon curtly remarked: "My movements are uncertain! I go—*whither—I know not—I care*

not! I am now a free American citizen, and,—*the wide world is my home!*"

Melville's weak indecision alone prevented him from pouring out his troubled heart, but the "facchini" bustling off the luggage broke off the last tête à tête, and so,—Melville left his friend, weakly guarding the Minister's pusillanimous confidences, and the last door was closed upon Sidney Landon's Roman life!

True it was that Rawdon Clark and Robert Brandon, junketing at the American Club,—laughed with good reason, over Sidney Landon's abrupt retreat!

"Dropped at the first flash of the gun," gaily said the capitalist.

"*Now for a clear field!* This jackanapes is out of the way! When Agnes gives me her plighted word, my way to the Senate is open, my passport to the home circles I must enter,—and,—your Consul Generalcy here is assured—the moment I am elected to the higher house! So, now, follow up Miss Hawthorn's movements to-day! *I want no last emotional interview!* Maspero is watching all at the Consulate and will dog this fellow's movements; I shall be waiting here at the Club

till midnight! Then, when he is gone, we will give Miss Agnes *the whole story!* I have the letters now from America which will rouse the last spark of womanhood in her heart! She will despise a man both seducer, fugitive and coward!"

Captain Landon left the Eveless Paradise before sundown with the unconcerned air of a tourist seeking a brief run in new pastures.

His perfunctory and careless adieux had deceived all in Rome save the Melvilles and the secretly hostile Minister. No one but the faithful Morgan was to be at the station at the time of his midnight departure and both Grimes and Hatton, respecting his wishes, had gone out on their far-winging search for new note book padding.

Alone in a little trattoria outside the walls, Sidney Landon anxiously awaited the hour of his meeting with Mrs. Melville. It was the last chord in his heart to snap—the only tie binding him to the graceful and spirited woman whom he had loved in spite of fate. The matron's offered championship touched his heart, and, yet, when the pale moonlight struggled with the somber shadows of the old Roman streets, and the bells of San Vincenzio tolled nine, he had found no

words of farewell for the one woman who had vowed herself his defender. Gertrude Melville's loyal bravery had stirred his heart to its utmost depths.

There were broken gleams lighting the somber walls of the Palazzo Poli,—as Captain Landon, wrapped in a cloak, his features shadowed with an Italian hat, approached the magnificent basin of the Fontana di Trevi.

His restless heart was soothed by the dashing floods pouring down over the massive rockwork, where bearded Father Neptune lorded it over the shimmering pool reflecting the silvery stars of night. Health and Fertility, half hidden in their riches, gazed out upon the tranquil night blessing the crystal flood still gurgling through Agrippa's subterranean channel. The romance of the old lingered around the hallowed parting place of generations of lovers.

The spring night was soft and balmy. Whispering lovers were gathered now around the great basin,—in all the tender thrills of a last farewell,—invoking the friendly spirit of the Aqua Virgo, and, watching with tear-stained eyes their silver offerings disappear in the darkened

waters wherein the broken reflection of the moon danced fitfully.

Mustachiod gens d'armes, cloaked and with folded arms,—silently peered out from under their laced chapeaux at the world wanderers,—the crowding beggars,—the self projecting blatant British tourists,—and the nervous Americans "doing Rome on a gallop!"

With a beating heart, Captain Landon threaded the crowd, until a soft hand was lightly laid upon his arm. He recognized in a moment the svelte figure of the gallant-hearted Gertrude Melville.

But he knew not the tall and stately form shrouded in deep black, which hovered at the lady's side.

"Hasten," whispered Gertrude. *"I have much to say to you!"*

Sidney Landon paused, and drew a silver coin from his pocket. "I must invoke the spirit of the fountain. *Do you the same!"*

And then two gleaming coins disappeared under the cool waves now rushing onward to their triple outlets.

The laughing waters danced away to the Piazza

di Spagna,—the far off Piazzi Navona, and the Piazza Farnese,—but, as the two turned away, the stately Niobe following them, suddenly extended a graceful arm and *a third coin* flashed in the pale moonlight.

Landon stopped not to admire the somber magnificence of the great cascade whose splendors recall Hadrian, Pope Nicholas V. and a noble line of historic art lovers.

In a shadowed angle, covered by the frowning walls of the Palazzo Poli,—with bated breath,—Gertrude Melville told the excited soldier of the cowardly slanders torturing all semblance of truth from the adventures on the Appian way.

The stately figure lingered a few paces apart until a persistent beggar finally drove the womanly watcher for shelter to the side of Landon and Gertrude.

It took all the soldier's menacing promptness to frighten off the bent figure of the bearded mendicant wrapped in a tattered coat!

"We must hasten! *I have more to tell you!*" anxiously whispered Gertrude Melville, as they watched the sullen beggar scuttle away.

Once around the corner of the piazza, the beg-

gar spy leaped into a waiting carriage! *"Here's news to wring more gold out of Rawdon Clark,"* muttered Maspero, "or,—to sate my revenge against this petit-maitre Melville.

"Per Bacco, the handsome wifely nurse steals out like a 'femme galante' to say addio to her soldier lover! *This is rich news!* I will keep it—till fit to sell, then Clark shall pay,—and—Melville know that he has been both betrayed and disgraced! *But, who the devil is the confidante!*

"Too large for that Hollingsworth gadabout, —it can't be Emilia or Lucia,—she would not dare to bring her own servants. Perhaps some sewing woman—or some American friend who has her own veiled amourettes! Basta! We are safe! The boy will track him down to the station.

"The handsome heiress, Miss Million, is at the Costanzi—fast enough! For she has been ill, locked behind closed doors, all the afternoon!"

And so, secure in the presence of his office messenger, left behind to follow the unsuspecting Captain to the train, Maspero returned to his own lair, so as to report to Rawdon Clark at midnight!

"Cospetto! I would have liked to have lin-

TWO GLEAMING COINS DISAPPEARED UNDER THE COOL WAVES.—*Page 222.*

gered—but,—the fretful fool advanced harshly upon me! False beard and wig would not stand a tussle—and,—a discovery now would ruin all.

The clock on San Vincenzio tolled eleven before Gertrude Melville had ceased her disclosures. She started suddenly, an innocent Cinderella. *"I must leave you,"* she fearfully said. "I have my ball dress hidden under these dark robes! My husband thinks that I am at the Princess Contarini's soiree. Do not attempt to follow us. Our carriage waits down there before the church.

"Remember,—if you would repay my care of you when you lay helpless,—swear to me that you will never divulge the name of Agnes Hawthorn, —as the woman whose life you saved on the Via Appia! I will watch for *your* sake—for *her* sake —over these slanderers here. My husband *must* protect your honor. He knows how nobly you have acted to save Agnes' name from the rending fangs of these human ghouls. But those who are fighting you from ambush here,—have some sinister purpose!"

Captain Landon grasped both the fair woman's hands. "I take but one heart sorrow away with me! The one woman on earth whom I could

have loved,—is as far from me now as the stars above the sordid earth below! Tell her that though I shall never see her again, I loved her,—but Fate was against me! But, Thank God—I can prove to her, in life and death,—I will be mute and silent!

"Her fair fame shall be preserved! Let them go on and slander me! I go out on my lonely way! But I carry her dear face graven in my heart, and,—*I will never forget her!*"

A choking sob made Landon start! The stately woman in black was standing with averted eyes—her face covered with her hands!

Gertrude Melville's voice thrilled his every fiber as she said:

"Confide in me! There is yet time! Recall your resignation!"

Sidney Landon was swayed as the storm shakes the pine. *"No,"*—he sadly cried. "Her wealth fences her from me with golden bars! And,—*Agnes Hawthorn shall not stoop to conquer!* There is a pride of *wealth!* There is also a pride of *poverty!* It is too late! Listen—Count upon me, in life and death! If there is any positive slander,—if this low cabal penetrates our inno-

cent secret,—if there is the name we both love attached to this alleged intrigue, only give Morgan a letter for me,—he will know where I am—and I will come back from the ends of the earth! And—*now*—God be with you,—*my sweet sister!*"

He stooped and kissed the trembling woman on her forehead. "*Go now,—there is no time to lose!* I shall watch you safely to your carriage."

In a sad silence, the three sought the darkened angle where the carriage waited.

The half disclosures of a half knowledge had driven Sidney Landon into a tossing sea of unrest!

He stood, hat in hand, as the carriage turned! It halted, a slender arm was extended! He covered the trembling hand with passionate kisses, and instinctively took the handkerchief and the knot of flowers which were clasped within the timidly extended fingers!

And then—the carriage moved swiftly off, bearing away the innocent truant from the Palazzo Vecchio.

Captain Landon turned with a smothered groan,—and hailed the first passing carriage.

His brain was still throbbing with the maddening disclosures, and his pulses bounding with the timidly hinted possibilities of a return!

"Never!" he sternly said, as he wrung Morgan's hands and leaped into the waiting train. "If I had only known this before—but,—*it is too late now.* My resignation is on the sea! The Egyptian War Ministry has my acceptance! I will bury my regrets in the Soudan! And, dear old Swasey has already taken my passage from Marseilles!"

Three hours later, at Orvieto, he awoke with a start, and, suddenly drew forth the little offering which he had thrust in his bosom.

There was a delicate bunch of rich Parma violets, a filmy lace handkerchief,—and knotted in the corner—a slender golden ring. He sprang up, and by the light of a fusee read, within the little circlet the word *"Agnes."*

His heart gave one mighty throb, as he remembered the veiled Niobe, the stately goddess of the night.

"My God! Was this her mute farewell!" He slept with the delicate token resting on his wearied heart.

CHAPTER X.

THE HARVEST OF ONE WEARY YEAR.

As the train rolled into the station at Nice—Captain Sidney Landon started to find General Rufus Hatcher and Consul Swasey, both there awaiting him.

He had recovered his composure since the discovery of the golden token now more precious to him than the ring with which the proud Venetian Doge made the Adriatic his bride.

When he had seen the lights of Rome sink down in the Campagna behind him, he had wrathfully murmured, "Banished from Rome! What's banished,—but set free, from daily contact with the things I loathe!"

And, *now,* he recognized the soft strategy of Gertrude Melville.

"Dear Heart!" he thought. "She fain would have the General persuade me to return! *Never!* Jacta alea est!"

And, yet, as he recalled the stately Niobe, he

heard again that choking sob,—the fond self-betrayal of a woman whom he *now* knew he loved beyond all of Eve's graceful daughters!

With a modulated courtesy, Landon held his inner soul, until after his establishment at the Hotel Chauvain. General Hatcher was dragged away to a dinner of the flagship.

"Remember, Landon, you are to give me one night, to-night, *my last!* I must take home some explanation of your sky-rocket path in life! Now, my boy,—*no heroics!* I've just had telegrams both from Melville and his fairy wife. Also a last joint appeal from Grimes and Hatton!"

Sidney Landon bowed his head before this evidence of friendships that followed on! With a quiet smile of triumph the silver-haired Consul haled Landon away to his office.

"Here we are, my meteoric young American friend! You are just such a fly-away as your gallant father!"

In the seclusion of the private office,—the old Consul handed Landon his letters and telegrams. "There you are, sir! When you are done I will have a few words with you! I'll take a stroll on the Beau Rivage till you digest these important

things! You must listen to the General's last appeal!"

The first telegrams he read were from the Egyptian War Ministry and they confirmed his appointment, and suggested his coming on, via Brindisi, to avoid the espionage of the English authorities at Malta.

The words, *"Expedition ready and awaiting your command,"* set his soldier's heart proudly beating.

The Messagerie Maritimes' dispatches reserving steamer accommodations at will was hastily thrown aside, and he tore open the last. His eyes lit up with a strange fire as he read Gertrude Melville's dispatch:

"Do not leave Nice until you receive my letter. You will understand why! *The ring will explain.*"

He started up to seek the Bureau de Tèlègraphes, and then remembered that he held the reputations of two women now dependent upon his prudence.

When General Hatcher, escaping from the fleet, opened his batteries upon the young soldier,

he was astonished at the buoyant brightness of the young man's demeanor.

And, nodding his approval, the courtly Swasey listened with joy to Landon's promise to remain a few days in Nice and think over all the General's newly fledged arguments.

The soldier's singular cheerfulness gave new hopes to the two amicable old conspirators, who brought right and left flank batteries to bear upon him.

The one plead with him to re-enter the Army, —and the other—to recall his resignation from the Consular service or to ask a transfer to the purely diplomatic career.

But loyally had Arnold Swasey guarded the secret of the Egyptian appointment, first tendered to Landon through him, as a lifelong friend of the gallant and accomplished Ferik Pasha—Lieutenant General Charles P. Stone.

Long after the elders had sought their rest, Sidney Landon poured his heart out in a letter to Gertrude Melville. He could devise no safe way of sending it so as to guard Agnes Hawthorn's secret, but to send it as a sealed Consular Dispatch to Edwin Morgan.

He dared not write to the heiress whose golden token still rested upon his heart, but when he had finished a letter whose veiled suggestion was meant in every line for the Lady of the Violets, he enclosed a ring which had been a companion in many a dangerous fray.

"This ring was one of my beloved and unforgotten mother's. Give it to my little playmate, and let her not forget the companion of so many happy hours. I will keep the other, and its return to you for the giver will only be the silent proof that my life is done! But, remember, that we parted at the Fountain of Trevi,—under its mystic spell! God be with you both till we meet again."

Under the protection of the Consular seal, with a note to the watchful Morgan,—Landon well knew that it would reach its destination! "And, so Agnes will know," he mused, "that I have recognized her token,—and respect the silence which I am now bounden to!"

While the three men sat in council at Nice, Rawdon Clark and Signior Jacopo Maspero craftily conferred at the Quirinale. *"Who the devil could this woman be, the one whom he met?"* fruitlessly demanded the baffled capitalist.

"What matters it to you?" sulkily rejoined Maspero. "Your inamorata was in camera,—surely locked up,—that we know, and,—your only enemy in Rome, Madame Melville, was away at the Contarini's ball! So the maids told me! Of course, if you wish it, I can trace out the intrigue, and find who was his only friend! Don't be surprised at any disclosure. Woman's eternal deviltries,—infidelities, and vagaries, are the only book of Life!"

"Stop your damned nonsense," roughly cried Clark. "Go ahead and find out! I will pay you!"

He was in a towering rage, for Madame Myra Brandon had reported to him that Miss Agnes Hawthorn had received the full disclosure of Dora Prindle's venom-filled letter unmoved and in a stony silence.

All that the heiress would vouchsafe was the cold remark, *"What matters it about this man?* He has passed out of our lives! He has departed from Rome! And, *I*—will leave next week for Vienna, my accident has only delayed the long settled trip."

Both suitor and spy were sorely smitten by this sudden blow.

To Myra Brandon it meant the cessation of Agnes Hawthorn's golden generosity—and, moreover, the end of Rawdon Clark's concealed subsidies.

To the angered capitalist it meant a long chase after the beautiful woman, whose dearest girlhood friend was now the wife of the American Minister at Vienna.

"She will be swept away from me," he growled —"the winter's work is lost,—or it will have to be all done over again!"

He trembled at the idea of a definite rejection —and,—yet,—the golden bird of Paradise was spreading its wings.

As he went home, Clark decided to have Robert Brandon make the full disclosure of the now open secrets of the rencontre of Agnes Hawthorn and Captain Landon on the Via Appia.

"I'll pop in pat, then, with my proposal—and, —she may see the prudence of marrying me! The only thing is to watch the mail and see that this puppy is not writing to her! I've fixed the thing with the Head Porter of the Hotel Costanzi.

"Myra Brandon will see every letter before she

gets them. And,—Jacopo Maspero will watch the private mail of the Consul General.

"Confound this Landon! He was far too intimate with Madame Gertrude. If Missy goes down there for a visit, it will show that the sly Melville is the go between! *Great Heavens! What a fool* I've been to forget. I must watch Landon at Nice and see that he does not sneak off to join Agnes Hawthorn in Vienna! And,—*dare I follow her over there?* Wait, my lady,—*wait* till I have you, under my thumb!"

It boded ill for the success of Rawdon Clark's Intelligence Bureau that Agnes Hawthorn was hidden the whole afternoon and evening of the day, when the morning's disclosures had shocked her, with Gertrude Melville. "That's the one place where I can not control her actions," growled Clark, hidden at the American Club and receiving Maspero's furtive messages.

Captain Sidney Landon's behavior was an enigma to the two seniors, when upon the third day of his arrival he fell again into the dull dejection which had marked his last days in Rome.

And, yet, a wolfish, haggard anxiety burned in his gleaming eyes! All the newly founded hopes

of General Hatcher were quickly buried—when the soldier sternly announced his irrevocable decision to abandon the army forever.

And, so, in sadness and sorrow, the old veteran made his way Parisward, cursing all regimental mysteries and foolish boys! *"It's some bit of devilish woman work,* I'll swear! I wish to God there was not a woman in the whole army."

But Consul Swasey alone knew that some new bitter grief had choked the dawning sunlight out of the young man's heart.

Hour by hour, while waiting for the answer to a letter just dispatched, heavily corded and sealed with the inviolate seal of the Consulate, Sidney Landon pored over the last womanly appeal of Gertrude Melville. He read again these words of doom:

"Agnes has come to me to hide her sorrows in our home! She is surrounded with sycophants and flatterers,—with false friends, and harassed by an importunate wooer. You now have your honor,—your peace of mind,—perhaps your future happiness in your own hands! I have not seen the letter, but Agnes has told me the whole story of Ethel Raynor,—of her death,—of her husband's self sacrifice,—of your hasty departure from the regiment,—of your sudden resignation!

And, now, if you would prove to the woman who might have loved you and blessed your life, that a blasted home, a woman's wrecked life, a gallant husband's betrayed honor, have not unfitted you for an honest woman's love,—then,—*come back!* Come at once! You can tell me the facts! You stand now at the parting of the ways! If you are innocent, *you will come!*"

Sidney Landon's face was seamed with thought as he waited for the response which was to decide his whole career in life.

He had, with his own hands, deposited in the mails the officially sealed envelope which contained the one appeal possible to the heart of the woman whom he now madly longed to crush to his bosom. He rejoiced that she had taken refuge with the Melvilles.

"Safe in that home, I can write her, and let her judge between the sorrows of a dead past, and the infamous lies of the woman fiend who has followed on my path for years!"

Too well he knew whose hand had dealt the blow, but how, and why, in what form, he knew not,—he only yearned to be called back to give the key of the past to the one whose withered violets still lay upon his heart!

After a heart struggle, he had decided to write to Agnes Hawthorn, and then leave the final decision with her!

In plain words, he briefly told her of his appointment in the Egyptian Army, for the desperate service in the Soudan and the Abyssinian campaign.

"I sought it *to forget you,*—your face, your smile, your haunting presence.

"Only if entitled to know that my whole, honest heart lies at your feet, can you ask me to tell the story of the past! There is but one woman I would tell it to,—to the woman who *is to be my wife!* I waive the question of your riches, to save my honor, to leave at least my memory white in your stainless heart! And so,—if you write me *'Come,'* I will come to you! I can return to Rome, and then go on to Egypt via Brindisi. I should wait until you have heard all from the only one who watches over the graves of two who suffered with me! *It will take time!* I ask you not to plight your word! Only to say, *'Sidney! I will trust you* until the truth shall deepen that trust into the certainty of my innocence! I will make the Abyssinian campaign, as bound in honor now, do a soldier's duty, and then come back to read my fate in your dear eyes! I will now wait here one week for your answer. Even Mrs. Melville has no right to the unsealing of my heart!"

While Sidney Landon, in burning impatience, walked the shores of the Riviera, at Rome, Jacopo Maspero laughed in a silent glee!

"This is surely my harvest year," he gaily cried.

The postman laughed as he pocketed Maspero's hundred-lire note for bringing all the mails for the Melvilles surreptitiously to a little wine shop fronting the Palazzo Vecchio.

Maspero chuckled at the possession of a set of the Consular seals of all the subconsulates in Italy, to reseal the correspondence sent on through the Consulate General.

It had paid him well to have one made, also—so as to open and reseal Consul Swasey's letters to the dilettànte Melville.

A past master of the art, the private seal of Sidney Landon was easily taken off with a bread paste impression, and this, in plaster, gave a matrix to close again the document upon which the soldier's life happiness hung!

In half an hour, Rawdon Clark was possessed of the copy! The millionaire's brow drew down in the scowl of murder as he said, "You are sure Morgan can not detect this letter opening?"

"*I pride myself,*" smiled Maspero, "*upon an accomplishment which is hereditary in the family!*"

"Then," deliberately said Clark, "there is five thousand francs cash for you to trap her answer, —this golden-haired fool! *I see it all!* Gertrude Melville has been Landon's mistress, and—husband and wife work together for profit. They covet Agnes Hawthorn's fortune!

"Now, Emilia and Lucia must watch both the Melville woman and my shy bird! *Her answer must fall into my hands!*"

"*Safe enough,*" laughed the scoundrelly Italian. "My postman will catch it at the office. If I do not get it there! The two women servants will do their work! They handle the letters."

"The cash is yours!" gruffly cried Clark. "*Damn that Landon!* I hope that he will feel what I feel now!"

Jacopo Maspero laughed over the love-lorn schemer's agony of jealousy—as he bade Emilia and Lucia do their devil's work, when Morgan glided in to the family apartment with the enclosures.

Arthur Melville, now wrapped up in his liquid

greens and yellows, had forgotten all his official cares and again—Maspero,—as of yore,—lorded it in the Consulate.

By midnight, the Italian scoundrel was at Rawdon Clark's bedside.

"I have the letter," he said. *"Here is a copy of it!"*

"You must give me *the original,"* sharply cried the excited Clark.

"Softly, *softly,"* brutally answered Maspero. "It is a State's prison offense to steal a letter! *I will not go to the galleys even for you!* I will open it,—read it to you,—show it to you—and give you the copy! Then I will seal it up again, and keep it for my protection. This fool will be far over the seas soon! If the loss is ever discovered, I can have the letter some months afterwards, discovered in some out-of-the-way place! I will hide it back—even for years,—but, I will not go to the galleys for you!"

"Give me the letter," yelled Clark.

"Money first!" sternly said Maspero, holding the letter and copy in one hand, and a glittering knife in the other.

With a curse—Clark handed over the money.

"You see how she loves him," gloatingly said the Italian rouè. *"I told you all women were alike!*

"Better go in and amuse yourself with the Consul's dainty wife; she is really the gamer intrigant of the two! Don't you see, if you get *her* in your power, she will help you to gain this golden-haired American Borgia's favor!"

He slowly backed out, warned by Clark's eyes.

The half-crazed Crœsus read the words:

"Come to me—Sidney! *Come*—and you will find my heart open to you! If you clear away this mystery, you will know that my heart has been yours—from the first."

There was the clear, womanly signature, *"Agnes Hawthorn."*

But three sentences were added below!

"I will wait for one week for your appearance! *If you do not come,*—I shall leave Rome and all its shams and lying deceits behind me—but, with a heavy heart! *I will have lost my whole faith in manhood!"*

Ten days later, Sidney Landon gazed moodily over the quarter of the steamer "Sphinx," at the green billows of the Gulf of Lyons, and—

Miss Agnes Hawthorn,—pale-faced and haughty —was watching the gay Viennesè crowds upon the Kaiser platz.

The stolen letter had sundered two loving hearts! With cautious scoundrelism,—the Honorable Rawdon Clark nursed his secret rage smoothly in Rome! He had followed up Sidney Landon's every movement,—day by day,—until he sailed for the land of the Pyramids.

With a sudden spasm of indignation,—Clark now shut his purse strings to the exuberant Mrs. Myra Brandon.

"By Heavens! I believe you bungled it, you clumsy fool," he said. "You and your goggle-eyed husband can now *shift for yourselves!*"

No one but himself knew of the stony composure with which Agnes Hawthorn had received his earnestly worded offer of marriage.

"Let it be just as if I had not heard it!" she calmly said. *"Come back to me in a year,—and tell me the same story!* If *you* are the same,—if *I* am different,—I may spare you the pain of a refusal, but I am world-weary now, and,—I *must* and *will* be alone!"

"There goes my Senatorial campaign," growled

Clark, who dared not press his fate further, and lose the golden-haired beauty forever!

And,—only Maspero was happy as he stole out, at night, to laugh over his dupe with the velvet-eyed Emelia, and the full-bosomed Lucia.

"Pray God to send us another fool *like this!*" he laughed,—ignorant that the steadfast Morgan was silently weaving the net around the unfaithful official!

And now— life dragged on wearily enough in the Palazzo Vecchio!

"He was base metal!" sighed Gertrude Melville, "and so he dared not face the ruin he had wrought! *God forgive him,* and—God help Agnes, who has lost all her faith in man!"

And, so—only the little playmate was left to mourn for the vanished man whose name in the clubs was now bandied as that of the common adventurer to whom the world is but an oyster!

And far away, on the burning sands of Egypt, a haggard-eyed man pressed on to where the fierce swordsmen of Abyssinia crouched like lions in their mountain gorges! It was a lean year, with only a harvest of sorrows.

The whole Roman community was set agog by

the leakage from the United States Legation of the cabled news of the appointment of Mr. Stillwell Meacham, late of Princeton University, as the new Vice Consul General of the United States.

The fact that the new appointee was the favorite nephew of the Minister Resident was artfully concealed by that wily official, now secretly afraid of being supplanted by Mr. Rawdon Clark.

This energetic capitalist,—at once, verified the rumor through the delighted Jacopo Maspero.

This crafty Italian duly presented his dupe and employer with a copy of the official cablegram of the State Department.

Clark was lifted at once from the dejection caused by the indifference of the Philadelphian heiress to his suit!

The magnificence of his hospitalities at the Cercle de Rome had endeared him to the local petite noblesse, and, now, he decided to vigorously follow up all the attacks upon the vanished Sidney Landon.

Even the Marquis Pallavinci was forced to confess to Charley Hollingsworth that the whole story of Landon's blackballing was now common

property, backed with a general denunciation of his cowardice in stealing away from Rome under the guise of a sick leave.

Forrest Grimes and Frank Hatton were even forced to fight nightly battles at the Eveless Paradise over the hopeless cause of a man who had not even dared to leave an address.

The story of the attempt to cover a Roman intrigue with the murder of a poor unarmed peasant,—and the imprisonment of two innocent carriage drivers was bruited abroad!

A hundred tongues were clacking away, "Dove la Donna?"

Rawdon Clark artfully hid behind the bustling Brandon and his now triumphantly revengeful wife.

There was none so poor as to do reverence to the memory of the man who had leaped on to the position of social favorite, only to fall in utter disgrace.

The American scandals of Landon's expulsion from the army were also now common property, and Gertrude Melville remained,—a forlorn hope, —the last friend of the absent one, save Doctor

Cesare Corvini and the imperturbable Edwin Morgan.

Rawdon Clark was following his enemy, hammer and tongs, and the arrival of several anonymous letters from different parts of America addressed to the United States Minister,—the Consul General and the Secretary of the American club, completed the pyramid of obloquy heaped upon the memory of the ruined man!

Plentifully accompanied with newspaper slips, these letters fanned the flames of scandal into a furious conflagration.

Mr. Rawdon Clark laughed as he carefully went over duplicates of these documents, in the safe retirement of his room.

"Barker Bolton is a cool one," he gaily cried. "No one will ever find out here that these same newspaper articles are fictitious."

The neat expedient of pasting headers cut from Western journals on matter printed by the "Intelligence Bureau" was a stroke of genius worthy of a Robert Macaire.

Resting content, now, with his labors,—Clark closed his campaign with having Mrs. Myra Brandon send on these apparent verifications of

Landon's disgraceful record to the unhappy heiress in Vienna.

"I will let these things do their quiet work," mused the capitalist. "I will send Mrs. Brandon over on a visit of motherly solicitude in a few weeks, and, before the Legislatures meet, I will find Miss Agnes in the Tyrol and offer her what few women dare decline—the proud place of *a Senator's wife.*

"When I tell her that my public career will depend upon her, this will shorten her year of probation. At any rate, Mr. Sidney Landon, I have paid you off,—and,—*with compound interest!*"

There was one fatal stroke of ill fortune which marvelously aided Rawdon Clark's plans. Gertrude Melville felt all a woman's resentment at Sidney Landon for leaving Nice without a single word of adieu to her.

"I risked my reputation as a woman, *my honor as a wife,*—to meet and warn him,—to give him a chance to meet his enemies with a frank defense! I even lured Agnes Hawthorn to the Fountain of Trevi,—and,—he covers his retreat like a criminal fleeing the thief taker!"

It had been in vain that Gertrude Melville had used all her arts upon Edwin Morgan, whom her husband vaguely deemed a Consular spy in his office.

The pale-faced student was only willing to state that he was ordered to send all matters for Captain Sidney Landon to Consul Arnold Swasey at Nice.

And, a personal appeal to that courteous old official only gave Mrs. Melville the news that Captain Landon had left Nice after a sojourn of ten days, simply directing all his mail to be sent to "Freycinet Frères," Bankers, Marseilles.

"*More I can not tell you,*" he wrote, "for I have been obliged to answer a cablegram of General Rufus Hatcher. '*Whereabouts absolutely unknown.*' I can only say that Landon left Nice in a desperate and unhappy mood!

"He seemed to wait for news from Rome of some character, and haunted the Post and Telegraph up to the moment of his leaving."

But neither Gertrude Melville nor the unhappy Agnes dreamed of any treachery.

And, all this, with the forged newspaper arti-

cles, Gertrude Melville sent on to Miss Agnes Hawthorn at Ischl in Tyrol.

The Melvilles were leaving Rome for their summer villa at Frascati, and only awaited the arrival of Vice Consul General Stilwell Meacham to go away for the long, unhealthy Roman season. Every turn of the tide had aided Clark's adroit scoundrelism.

When Miss Hawthorn read all these excerpts by the rushing rivers of the Austrian Alps, she sighed and then tore the letters and papers to tatters!

Throwing them in the black, sparkling mountain torrent, she sighed, "*It is true!* He dared not return and face his record!"

She resolutely closed the gates of her heart to the past; she tried to forget the shattered idol, and her cheek burned in blushes at the shame of her impulsive offering on that fateful night by the waters of Trevi, of the gentle self surrender of the unanswered letter.

While the two fond women buried Sidney Landon's memory away out of their sight,—stung by the treason of the recreant soldier's desertion of his social colors, Gertrude Melville did

not know the last sting which had rent Agnes Hawthorn's heart!

For, the fair girl could not bring herself to own to her dearest friend that she had called back to her side,—*a man who had scorned her!*

"Never!" the orphaned girl swore in her heart! *"Death first,—this crowning disgrace is my secret alone!"*

And, the happiest man in Rome now was Signior Jacopo Maspero, fondling his hoard of yellow French gold, the dirty wages of his triple betrayal.

"One more triumph is to be mine!" he gloated. "To sell the news of Madame Melville's midnight assignation at the Trevi fountain to Clark! He will strike her mercilessly—for she always has flouted him!

"I will be safe, and my cup of revenge will be a delicious draught!"

Maspero now exulted in the possession of the number of the carriage and the coachman's name, used on the fatal rencontre by Trevi's glittering cascade. He was on the verge of the discovery which would have made his fortune for life and

given Agnes Hawthorn's reputation over to Rawdon Clark's cruel keeping.

But, the brave American girl had returned alone and on foot to the Hotel Costanzi, slipping in at a side door, in garments picked up by her for the Carnival, a simple black dress of the middle class Roman women, with a shrouding veil. Brave at heart she had been, in her unconfessed love for the wanderer in Egypt—the man who had scorned to answer her appeal!

The long summer had burned itself away, and the winds of November were shrieking about the Pincian hill, when Consul General Arthur Melville summoned Edwin Morgan to a crucial examination of Sidney Landon's affairs in the studio of the Palazzo Vecchio.

Poor Morgan was now only the office drudge of the supercilious young collegian who "ruled the roost," and threw "my uncle" even at the head of the Consul General upon all occasions.

It was the same old Rome, with a new budget of social scandals!

But, all the gilded circle "within the pale" knew that Mr. Rawdon Clark was lingering at Vienna, hovering in the bewitching presence of Miss

Agnes Hawthorn, who was soon going on to Paris, to prepare for her presentation to that most august of majesties, Queen Victoria.

The brilliant reign of Miss Hawthorn at the Austrian Court had led the ambitious beauty to spread her wings for further flight.

The owner of the Elkhorn mine had left hosts of friends behind him in Rome, for his genial way had been paved with golden hospitalities.

Steady old Forrest Grimes, loyal at heart, confided his last lingering doubt to Frank Hatton, now an avowed protégé of Clark, who lavished every possible consideration upon the man who was a cover to his masked guns!

Unsuspicious in prosperity, Frank Hatton was blinded by Clark's officious generosity. He was now a noted knight of the pen!

"Il avait fait son chemin."

"*Frank,*" wrathfully ejaculated Grimes, suddenly, one lonely night, "*I shall always believe that Sidney Landon was trapped in some mean way!* I can not tell you all! Clark 'had it in' for him, with abundant good reason! This western Crœsus is a tireless lover! Such a man is a desperate enemy! I believe in some hidden

way Landon fell into a pit dug by his enemy."

But honest Hatton only sighed:

"He nailed down his own coffin by clearing out! Why did he not trust to us?"

It was after an hour's close mental scrutiny that Consul General Arthur Melville gave up the task of entrapping Consular Clerk Edwin Morgan into admissions of confidential relations with the departed Landon.

"I have not heard from Captain Landon since his departure, save one brief note, written at Nice, with final orders to send all mail to Consul Arnold Swasey," said Morgan.

"And, for good or ill, you must rest content with this! *It is the whole truth, so help me God!"*

Morgan dashed away and returned with the letter!

"You can certify a copy of that under seal, and keep it!" said the now defiant young man.

"See here, Morgan," cried the mollified official. "Look at this! We *must* find this man! We are, *in honor, bound* to find him!"

He handed the young man a letter and narrowly watched him as he read:

"*Urgent and Important.*

"Law Offices of Hayward, Homans and Ross,
"No. 58 La Salle Street,
"St. Louis, Missouri,
"November 10th, 18——.

"Consul General Arthur Melville,
"U. S. Consulate General,
"Rome, Italy.

"Dear Sir:—We appeal to you to officially aid us in discovering the whereabouts of Captain Sidney Landon (late U. S. Army), and, later, Vice Consul General, accredited to your office.

"We are now in correspondence with all the Legations and Consulates of Europe upon the same subject, as well as those in the Orient.

"Messrs. Freycinet Frères, of Marseilles, absolutely decline to give his whereabouts, as being a confidential instruction of their depositor and client, though they claim to have forwarded a letter sent to them by us, on the advice of Consul Arnold Swasey, of Nice.

"The urgency of our business is explained by the fact that our esteemed client,—the late Mr. John Vaughan Landon, of St. Louis, died three months ago, leaving an estate, consisting of realty, steamboat property, cash in bank, and various lead manufactory stocks, amounting to over one million dollars.

"This vast property is absolutely and unconditionally left to Captain Sidney Landon.

"Our late client had no communication for many years with Captain Landon's father, as he was an unsuccessful suitor for the hand of the Captain's mother.

"The young gentleman thus suddenly enriched may be even ignorant of the existence of this past family tie.

"Both the dead Landons were peculiar men.

"If you can give us no information, cable to us at once.

"Any expenses that you may incur will be at once remitted. You may advertise in such papers as you choose.

"Failing to find him, we shall send our special agent to Europe to look him up, directed by Freycinet Frères. We refer to Messrs. Drexel, Morgan & Co., London.

"We have also invoked the aid of the American Ambassador at Paris.

"Cordially yours,
"Hayward, Homans and Ross."

The young official laid the letter down with a sigh.

"If it were Golconda's mines, I can tell you no more.

"I fancy, in time, these cautious Frenchmen will divulge their secret, when they know it is to his advantage. I have already forwarded a half dozen letters from these lawyers to Nice.

"I keep a record of all Captain Landon's mail with the ear marks."

When the clerk was dismissed, Arthur Mel-

ville drove to the Telegraph Bureau and sent a reply to the St. Louis lawyers.

Some undefined fear of the hostile Minister Resident tied his tongue, and, when he returned from a week's visit to Nice, he had still concealed from even his wife all reference to Landon's windfall. He brought Morgan into the studio to give him a confidential disclosure.

"Swasey tells me that Freycinet Frères have telegraphed Captain Landon's address to the lawyers in America upon the peremptory demand of an Assistant Secretary of Legation sent down from Paris.

"Also, that they guarantee Landon's receiving the entire mail forwarded! He is now somewhere in the Orient, and,—all this, you are to keep as a strict secret! No one but Swasey, you and I know of these facts."

While the fickle goddess of Fortune was chasing the mortal whom she had so bitterly chastened,—upon the deck of an Italian transport,—in the harbor of Massowah,—a gaunt and wasted form lay stretched out in a hammock under the deck awnings.

No one who had ever seen Captain Sidney

Landon lead his squadron of the Grays across the cavalry plain at Fort Stanton, would have recognized the bearded skeleton, who now watched, with hollow eyes, the sand dunes of Massowah fade away, as the steamer "Colombo" swept out into the burning waters of the Red Sea!

An English orderly, an adventurer,—a hardened East Indian deserter,—watched over the man who had brought away a terrific sword slash in the left shoulder, as a memento of the desperate fighting on the fatal plain of Gura.

But, when the Abyssinian hordes had swarmed down over the one six-gun battery which held them back for an hour,—Deserter Jack Haddon, a game Yorkshire tyke, shot the leading Ras,—at half pistol distance, and then—aided by the last of a gun crew, dragged Lieutenant Colonel Sidney Landon into a place of safety, where a few desperate men, at bay, working the deadly Remingtons, turned the tide of assault down upon the shrieking mass of Egyptian fugitives in the ravine below. They were richer food for the thirsty two-handed swords of the mountain devils.

With incredible hardship, Sidney Landon had been gotten down to Massowah, and, touched by his lion-like daring, the recreant Prince Hassan pinned a grand star of the Medjidjie on the wounded man's breast, and then ordered him to have every honor shown him in that disgraceful home-coming to Cairo. The Giaour had been the bravest of the brave, and saved the right wing of the army.

Leaving the wreck of the proud army of Abyssinia to be brought home later from Massowah, —Prince Hassan urged on the "Colombo," so as to be the first to report the disaster at Court,— wrapped in euphemistic lies.

While the Abyssinian lions and jackals feasted upon the bodies of nine thousand slain,—while the desert vultures followed the train of captives and gorged themselves in feasting upon the decapitated bodies of those who fell by the way, the harem-bred Egyptian prince hastened back to the delights of the Shoubrah,—to the mystic pleasures of the lordly seraglio.

Deserter Haddon, loyal when others fell off, brought his man into Suez in good shape.

Colonel Landon's staring eyes had regained

their brightness,—his wound was healing, fairly well, for the sweep of the two-edged sword had been stayed by his thick shoulder knots and tough canteen strap.

"We'll have you on your feet in a jiffy, Colonel," cheerily cried the Yorkshireman, as he skirmished for the best place in the special train waiting them at Suez!

Two days later, Doctor Warren Bey took charge of the hero of Gura, and installed him in a fair upper chamber at Shepheards'.

It was only after General Stone had heard the story of the disgraceful rout at Gura from Colonel Landon's own lips that he handed over the soldier's accumulated mail!

"*You are to have a year's leave of absence, with the rank of Pasha,—upon full pay!*

"I do this by Prince Hassan's direct order. He informed His Higness the Khedive that you were the man who saved the wreck of the army by the magnificent fighting of the steel battery upon the hill!"

The silver-haired old veteran whispered, "*Get out of Egypt!* Leave as soon as you can! I'll send your orders and your advance pay down!

"Be sure to give the paymaster twenty-five guineas backsheesh! They are uneasy till you leave! *The palace circle do not want you to talk!*"

Colonel Landon silently bowed his promise to get out! He well knew now where poison and assassination lurked.

"*Where to?*" he murmured. "Greece, or Sicily, or the south of Italy,—there is the place to recover! *Make it Sicily!* It is the garden of the Mediterranean."

So said the anxious Lieutenant General, as he took his hasty leave.

Handy man Jack Haddon ran into the Colonel's room, when he heard the wounded soldier's shout of surprise.

A couple of hastily opened letters lay upon the floor.

"*Jack,*" laughingly said the new-made Pasha. "*It rains good luck!* I've just been promoted to the rank of Pasha,—I have a year's leave of absence, and, *I have had a fortune left to me in America!*

"Now, let us get out of here, *as soon as possible!* General Stone wants me to take the next steamer

to Brindisi. He will send me down to Alexandria on a special train."

"Do I go, sir," hastily cried the excited Englishman. "You shot the fellow who made that unfair left-handed slash at me," good humoredly said the soldier.

"You have a soft billet for life! I'll never forget you lugging me up into that little dead angle on your back! If you can stand being a valet, consider yourself enlisted, *for life!"*

"I waited on Captain Maitland, of the Eighth Hussars, two years in India," joyously exclaimed the deserter.

"Remember," sternly said Landon. "Not a word of my private affairs! I wish no one to know of my American windfall! The paymaster comes down to-night! I want you to get me up a complete traveling outfit!"

"Right you are, sir," laughed Haddon; "the blackeys got all our luggage! God! How the beggars came boundin' on with them 'ere long cross-handled swords! and that there bloomin' Ras I shot!

"He loomed up through the smoke like a giant, and then, when I potted him,—his blasted horse

came rockin' down almost on my head with the dead man!

"An' they're a decoratin' themselves now with our belongin's,—the boundin' big black beggars!

"We are left almost naked."

"Be sure to get *your own* outfit, a regular swell gentleman's gentleman," laughed Landon.

"*Is it safe where we be a goin', Sir?*" hazarded the deserter.

"Oh! We are off for Palermo la felice," gaily cried Landon.

"I shall winter in Sicily. I want to run over and see Naples and the south of Italy! *Don't be* afraid! A pair of mutton chop whiskers and dark clothes will take all the soldier out of your appearance! Besides, I can get any American consul to give you a provisional 'laissez passer' passport! When we go over next year to shoot some big game in the Rockies, you shall become an American citizen.

"I will go over in the early spring to settle my affairs! I would not dare to cross the Atlantic just yet!"

The newly made Pasha fell into a dreamy ret-

rospect as the soft night fell and the great white stars glittered on the blue flowing Nile.

One mad, wild thought came to his awakened heart! *"We are equals now!* I am within the golden pale! Shall I seek Agnes out?"

The stinging remembrance of her cold ignoring of his last heart-wrung appeal to her mercy chilled him! *"Never!"* he cried. *"She would not even notice my cry in a last agony of soul!* And,—my fortune comes to me *too late!* I will see the south of Italy, but never return to Rome, my via dolorosa!"

And then some strange spell fell upon him! *"We drank together of the waters of Trevi!* I saw her throw her own silver offerings into the water. 'Date obolus Neptune!' *Ah! No,"* he sighed, waking.

"Ah! No! Ah! No! The waves may fling their whiteness o'er the sea,
But Time nor Tide will never bring my false love back to me!"

While Landon mourned his vanished hopes, Agnes Hawthorn at Vienna was startled at an appealing letter from Gertrude Melville begging her to visit her at Rome, while en route to Paris.

"You know you asked me to watch over your name,—to be your defender here! There is danger of a complete disclosure of the adventure outside the gates of San Sebastiani. I dare not write all—I can not come to you, I am tied down here!

"I can not confide even in my husband, and the Fountain of Trevi calls you back to me! I can arrange all! *Telegraph at once!*"

That evening Gertrude Melville cried, "Thank God!"—as she opened a telegram saying, "I will come and—we will go down to Naples together, as we planned so long ago."

Book III

THE FAITHFUL FOUNTAIN DEAR TO LOVERS

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CHAPTER XI.

IN THE BLUE GROTTO.

It was two months after the quiet flitting of the newly made Pasha from Cairo when Sidney Landon, now rejuvenated by the soft Sicilian air, betook himself to a pretty little villa at Sorrento.

In vain he tried to face the idea of a visit to Rome! There was a pang in every memory which called up that fair imperial face, golden wreathed, which had first met his ardent gaze upon the Pincian.

"I should not care to meet her," he mused. "She has answered the eternal No! by her cold silence. Not even a single word did she waste on the man who at least saved her from the brutal pillage of the robbers of the Campagna."

His face hardened when he thought of the unrevenged insult of the pompous Minister Resident, and the frightened subserviency of Arthur Melville!

"*No! I will not go to Rome!* I will never drink of the waters of Trevi again," he indignantly vowed. "I can easily get Grimes and Hatton out of Italy for a tramp in Switzerland, or a month in the Scottish hills by and by!"

The pseudo Pasha was as yet ignorant of all the clouds resting upon his name, the simple falling off of Agnes Hawthorn's social friendship being enough to banish him from Rome!

"*I suppose that she belongs to Clark now,*" he sighed.

With a careful agnosticism as to the St. Louis fortune, he wrote to Messrs. Freycinet Frères to have their American correspondents investigate, and to report back by cable the results at once.

With a sudden freak of Timon-like misanthropy, he carefully concealed his identity at Sorrento. It was an easy matter.

His Marseilles mail was all sent under cover to Mr. John Haddon at Naples.

And a confidential letter to Consul Arnold

Swasey gave that same lively English person's name as a forwarding mail agent. Locally, disguise was easy.

Landon now sported a red fez and a flowing beard, his face was burned almost black by the Abyssinian sun and the glare of the Red sea.

Haddon, the newly fledged soldier valet, had picked up a very fair French knocking around the Mediterranean after that desertion which forced him to avoid even the shadow of the British flag.

For the "Widow's" arms are long, her "steel bracelets" have an enduring grip, and Jack Haddon was not desirous to become an expert in "oakum picking."

There seemed to be little doubt of the solidity of the strangely devised fortune. For Consul Arnold Swasey wrote under cover to "Mr. John Haddon" that he was authorized to advance through Drexel, Morgan & Co. any sum of ready money to the beneficiary up to the sum of fifty thousand dollars, upon the heir's draft on Hayward, Homans & Ross, accompanied by a legal certificate of Sidney Landon's identity under the Consular seal.

"It seems that it is not fairy gold—*after all!*"

mused Landon. The one bitter drop in his cup of joy was Swasey's careful statement that neither letter, telegram nor message had reached the Consulate at Nice—coming from Rome.

And, Edwin Morgan, secretly notified by Consul Swasey, had duly sent on a list of all Landon's outgoing mail. There was the tell-tale date, with the note of the delivery of two sealed letters to Mrs. Gertrude Melville. *"There could have been no miscarriage of my letters,"* sighed the newly made Pasha, whose brow darkened as he learned that Miss Agnes Hawthorn was once more back in Rome, the guest of the Melvilles, on her way to Paris and London.

The fact of Rawdon Clark being her principal escort and magnificent entertainer told an ominous story.

Beyond the fact of Vice Consul General Stilwell Meacham's alliance with Maspero, and Morgan's renewed official slavery, there was no news, save that Forrest Grimes had been made Chief of a great Literary Syndicate in London,—and that honest Frank Hatton was now given carte blanche and a roving commission to cover all the Continent and the Orient for the Philadelphia

Mail, now rapidly becoming an aggressive sensational journal under the hard pressure of Rawdon Clark's unflagging ambition.

"Poor Morgan!" sighed Landon. "If this estate turns out what it might be I will make him my personal representative and business manager, for I'll settle things up,—take Jack Haddon as 'man Friday' and,—then—do the world in good shape."

His youth stood him in good stead, and the beauty of the witching coast led him far seaward in his splendid lateen sailed cutter, "Santa Lucia."

Jack Haddon proved to be a human treasure and on his excursions to Naples transacted all his master's business, while Landon, in mufti, dreamed around Herculaneum and Pompeii, only visiting Naples at night to escape American tourists.

To the villa dwellers, the young Pasha was only known as a Turk of vast wealth, and so, many bright-eyed women vainly peeped over the garden walls to see Fatima with the Silver Veil hovering in the gardens of "El Turco."

These pretty tourists and local visitors were, however, all doomed to disappointment, even that

audacious Russian Princess with the dancing black eyes, who so frankly invited herself to breakfast with the recluse.

Over the cigarettes and cognac, with a pleading glance,—she cried seductively: "Mon Pasha! Montrez moi votre harem! Ca ne vous fera pas mal! Je vous assure que je suis bon garcon!"

The mutine Princess sighed in a pretty distress at the embarrassed denials of the mysterious Pasha, but the little dèjeuner was really charming —and, she gaily bore away a bracelet of priceless scarabei as a trophy, leaving only a rose from her passionate bosom to remind Landon that he could not escape "l'eternal feminine."

Judicious letters from Ferik Pasha Stone soon convinced Landon of the unanimity of the Cairene princes in their desire that Lieutenant Colonel Landon should continue to amuse himself abroad and never return to tell the story of Prince Hassan's cowardice and the incapacity of the Egyptian generals who allowed their men to be butchered like sheep.

"You must *not* come back to Egypt," wrote the courtly old West Pointer. "There have been some brutal courts martial,—a number of officers

summarily shot,—and murderous duels arranged to put men out of the way, in which paid Italian renegades have butchered honest officers who knew too much! Consider that your leave with pay is extended à discretion. *A word to the wise is sufficient!"*

It was only when the young Pasha had received the final cabled confirmation of his good fortune from Freycinet Frères that he felt free to answer General Stone. "I guess that it's all right," he laughingly said, when he read their telegram:

"Lawyers and executors perfectly reliable. Estate has no involvements. No contests or adverse claimants. The property is solid and most advantageously invested. Draw on us up to a hundred thousand francs à vôtre Volontè."

"That settles it!" mused Landon. "When these sly Frenchmen will offer a stranger a hundred thousand francs *of their own money*,—this fortune is not a ghost story."

He wrote at once to the loyal old General Stone that he would use his full leave and keep his Pasha's rank merely as an incognito.

Briefly telling of his good fortune,—he said:

"I shall buy a stiff big schooner yacht, a sailing vessel of five hundred tons, and run around the world, for my knowledge has been too much confined to the waving grassy sea of our boundless prairies.

"You can drop me off the Egyptian Army List, but *not out of your heart,* at the expiration of the year—for, when I next see the royal advance of the wild Abyssinian horse,—or meet the rush of their leaping two-handed swordsmen,—their frantic spearmen,—I want something stiffer than Egyptian fellahs behind me!

"But one thing would ever call me back to Gura's bloody plain. It would be to put up a monument to my dead friend, the plucky little Captain Mohammed Ali, who died fighting that steel battery as bravely as Pickett's men struggled up to Hancock's bloody Gettysburg lines, where Lee found the Yankees, at last, a living 'Stonewall!' Poor Mohammed! He stood the pyramidal rush off for an hour and a half! I saw him carrying shell in his own hands, and the very last time he passed me, the gallant Arab cried, in his broken English, *'Battery good,—you see!'*

"To which I replied with my only Arabic

words, *'Taib Ketir!'*—in other words,—*'way up, —you bet!'*

"A single brave man, in a clan of cowardly officers! As Sergeant Jack Haddon lugged me away, I saw Mohammed's white, ghastly face lying under his favorite gun!

"When he crossed Al Sirat, let us hope that hordes of the beauties of that Mussulman Paradise escorted him to cooling bowers by the heavenly Bendemeer!"

Perfectly secure now in his incognito,—safe in the loyalty of Swasey,—Morgan and Freycinet Frères,—Sidney Landon soon became the boldest yachtsman of the Tyrrhene sea.

The wild sweep of the winds from old Carthage curling the white-crested billows delighted his troubled soul! The stars mirrored in the blue deep soothed him, and he felt a fierce delight as his craft bounded along as "shrill sang the tackle, sang the sail."

Drifting under Sorrento's storied steeps, gliding out from under the purple shadows of Monte Tiberio, into the sapphire bosom of Amalfi's bay, or,—floating off Castellmare,—his winged boat hanging between heaven and earth,—he listened

to the laughter of the Italian women, borne by the willing winds out across the soft foam of the silver breakers!

Ischia, sculptured and stately,—blue Capri haunted by the memories of the voluptuous Tiberius,—Tarentum, Gaeta and Isola,—he watched them all glide by, in an unrivaled panorama, while his wild boatmen sang "Santa Lucia," and eyed their strange master in a stupid wonder! These were days in which the beauty of sea and shore stole over his darkened soul, and he put off from day to day, in this enchanting dolce far niente, the answer to the lawyers' appeals to settle a time for his home coming.

He had put all the sorrows of his past life behind him, even the malignity of the envious woman far away whose anonymous letters had darkened the last year of his army life!

He would have swept on to Rome as an avenger of his honor—had he known of the web of infamy woven around his dishonored name!

But the half confidences of his friends had left him unarmed against the poisoned breath of secret slander.

It was with a delicious sense of indecision that

Landon bade the sailing master run out to sea, when he left his anchorage under the walls of Paradise, on an entrancing morning, and vaguely pointed toward Capri and Ischia.

He had made the ocean his friend, and, blown far off to sea, he felt the truth of Buchanan Read's exquisite lines:

> "No more, no more the worldly shore
> Upbraids me with its loud uproar."

Five hours later the falcon fleet boat skimmed into La Marina, where the Pasha gave his crew a run among the laughing-eyed women of that merry shore where care never abides.

A fancy to visit the Blue Grotto once more was upon him, and as the "Santa Lucia" swept on toward the Grotto Azzura, Landon merrily cracked on all sail and chased a pretty little yacht flying the American colors.

He lay at ease as the swift lateen boat skimmed by its overtaken adversary, and idly watched that silken fluttering ensign!

He noted not the graceful forms of the two ladies, nor the face of the one cavalier! His mind was far away in the past!

He dreamed over again the wild days of his life in the Sioux country! He felt again the thrill with which bearing down upon the yelling Indian foe he had raced with his guidon bearer in the maddening charge.

But he suddenly sheered off his yacht as he saw field glasses brought into requisition,—the "Santa Lucia" was well to the front, he was in no mood for a rencontre, and so he bore away with the rippling laughter of the two women still ringing in his ears.

It was for mere social self protection that his dainty cutter bore the white flag with the blood-red crescent and star of Egypt.

"They are probably guying me for a 'terrible Turk,'" he murmured to Haddon, who was acting "Boatswain" and contemptuously bossed the swarthy Italian crew, whose red knitted night caps and golden ear rings were the secret scorn of the sturdy Englishman.

"Looks like a lot of bloomin' old women,—they does," sneered Haddon, "an' yet spry enough, for beggars as lives on yard long bread, drinks green sweet oil and has a pocket of dried olives in them frenchified trousers.

"Say, now,—a steamin' joint or a rattlin' beef-steak would drive 'em all mad. An' them yaller crawlin' snails—*Damme!*"

Pasha Landon curiously watched the strange yacht brail up her sail and come up in the wind before the low entrance of the world-renowned Bower of Undine, the fairy Grotto Azzura.

"They've a lubberly way of handlin' that there pinnace," growled Haddon, as the two ladies and their escort were got over the side, in the lee of the little pleasure craft, into its small boat towed astern.

"Better a' trusted to these skiff fellers what haunts these holes in the rocks here like the comes! This 'ere grotto is their only livin'!

"Aye! There, you lubbers!" he cried as one of the ladies half rose in fright, and was restrained by the man who sat in the stern.

Sidney Landon kept his boat on under way and feasted his eyes upon the incomparable panorama of Monte Solaro dreaming there above them, the white-walled Hermitage, and the shattered walls of the Castello di Barbarossa.

"A fairy island, floating on an enchanted sea," he murmured. "No wonder the world-sated Ti-

berius dreamed away ten years in this delightful maze.

"With his twelve villas dedicated to the Gods —his great palace 'Villa Jovis,'—the proud Roman thought little as he governed the world from this island speck, that the pale face of the martyr of Calvary would drive his gods away into an eternal oblivion.

"But Rome's eagles have perished,—the cross of the Nazarene still glitters over the Capitoline hill, and, Pan murmurs no longer in the reeds by the river!"

At an inquiring sign from Haddon, Landon briefly cried, "Go about, we'll go back to the Grotto!"

"Will you go in, sir?" asked Haddon. "Them there Americans is gone, their yacht is out of sight!"

Sidney Landon nodded an assent, and the "Santa Lucia" swooped down to the shoals west of the grotto's half-hidden entrance.

In a few moments, the anchor was dropped, and Landon, with Haddon, stepped into the skiff of the eagle-eyed islander who well knew how liberal El Turco was.

"The light will be superb to-day," carelessly said Landon as he lay down in the skiff, while Haddon lay down on the other side. Only in this way could they glide under the low wall of the opening.

They darted in under the low three-foot arch of the huge overhanging rocks, and the boatman, with one last vigorous stroke of his oars, laid himself flat down—as the light skiff dashed in, swept on by the gleaming blue and silver flood!

There was a sudden crash,—then a woman's voice rang out in a shrill wail of agony, and, in a moment, Sidney Landon was swimming for his life in the phosphorescent gleaming flood.

As he rose to the surface, the soldier saw a woman's form swept by him, gleaming strangely in the lambent blue light.

"All right, sir, I've got this 'ere one," puffed Haddon, as he vigorously swam toward the little landing place at the right of the grotto where the broken steps still marked the old land entrance used by Tiberius.

Landon never glanced at the three boatmen now clinging to their overturned skiffs, but he

firmly caught the drapery of the woman near him as the undertow was drawing her out to sea.

With a dozen vigorous strokes, the Pasha gained the rocky landing, where, in the blue radiance, the hardy Englishman was now leaning down to aid him with his helpless burden.

There was puffing and sputtered prayers as the boatmen, swimming alongside their skiffs, piloted toward the safe landing place a man who was frantically clinging to the gunwales of the water-logged craft.

Landon paid no attention to the cowardly man as he scrambled out, but was leaning over the young woman whose face rested upon his knees.

Scream after scream rang through the cavern while Landon labored to revive the half-suffocated woman.

The three boatmen had skillfully righted the Capri built skiff and were now quickly bailing it out with the scoops lashed to the gunwales.

"Get out to my boat and bring some matches and candles, and a bottle of brandy," cried Landon, while Haddon grumbled, "*'Ow the devil did this 'ere thing 'appen?* The blasted fools had a right to sing out! Who knew you were in here

anyway?" he wrathfully cried to the rescued man who was shaking himself like a water dog!

But Sidney Landon paid no heed to all their clamor! He cried in his anguish, *"Dead, my God, dead. Agnes, speak to me,* speak but once."

For it was the lovely face of the woman who had scorned him,—the face of the beauty of the Pincian, the fair American heiress, which lay there, gleaming pale and cold in the exquisite blue light!

It seemed an age till the skiff returned, and then, Paolo, Landon's man, lit a port fire and handed a lighted candle to each of the little party clinging to the narrow rocky ledge.

Landon was on his knees forcing a draught of cognac into the mouth of the woman whose faint moans now told of returning consciousness.

"Who are you?" blubbered Robert Brandon, as he gazed at Landon's flowing beard and the Turkish fez still clinging to his sunburned temples.

"None of your business, you fool!" shouted Landon. *"Keep off,—or I'll throw you into the water!* Paolo!" he cried. "Get out around the

point and have these people's boat come up to the cave!"

The quick-witted Italian tossed a dry boat cloak up to the narrow ledge.

"Now, madame," decisively said Landon. "I will get you and this young lady out to my yacht, here at anchor, and send the pinnace back for the others. Let me direct the boatmen!"

"Great God! It is Sidney Landon!" almost shrieked Gertrude Melville, but the soldier answered nothing, as he directed Haddon and one boatman to steady the now bailed-out pinnace of the Naples yacht, while he wrapped Agnes Hawthorn in the boat cloak and lowered her into the shallop.

"Step in now, Gertrude," cried Landon. "Drink a draught of this brandy! *It may save your life!"*

Handing the bottle to the frightened artist, Brandon,—the soldier, with cool, sharp commands, guided the pinnace out under the dangerous arch.

"How did it happen?" faintly asked Gertrude Melville, still half dazed as she gazed in wonder at Landon's altered appearance.

"Your people should have kept the boat lying

off the cave, or had your men shout a warning in coming out! But I see that they are only Neapolitan boatmen and know nothing of the rules of safety of this dangerous entrance!"

By this time the pinnace had glided alongside the Santa Lucia,—and a dozen brawny arms lifted the helpless Agnes Hawthorn out of the boat.

"Go back and get that man!" sharply ordered Landon, as he said, "Mrs. Melville, you shall have the cabin. The little Italian boy will give you anything you wish. I recommend you to get back to La Marina as soon as your boat comes!"

"Promise me that you will come to us at Naples, Hotel Bristol! We will be there a week," —cried Gertrude Melville shaking herself like a water rat.

"Where have you been?" she eagerly demanded.

"In Abyssinia," Landon gravely said. "I am now a Pasha in the Egyptian Army, serving with Lieutenant General Stone. I was wounded at the Battle of Gura, and I have been given a year's leave of absence to go around the world!

"Go to her,—Gertrude," he cried, as the hulk-

ing form of Robert Brandon came over the side.

The artist's face blackened in a scowl as he, at last, recognized his maritime host. *"Don't go down in that cabin,"* sharply said Landon. "Here, Tito, wait upon this man!"

They could see the Naples boat now being warped along with sweeps a half a mile away. *"Whose boat is this?"* gruffly demanded Brandon.

"Mine!" emphatically said the soldier. "Hark ye!—Mr. Robert Brandon, if it were not for these two half-drowned women,—I would pitch you overboard, and let you swim ashore! I know you for a dirty lickspittle and a coward tale-bearer,—an eater of crumbs from other men's tables!"

And then—Landon, turning his back, philosophically cast off his drenched sea jacket, and allowed the alert Italians to unloose his shoes, wring out his garments, and, quickly wrapping himself in a long boat cloak, he took a generous draught of cognac and lit a Trabuco! "See that the Signior wants for nothing," the Pasha ordered to his over-anxious cabin boy.

A grim silence reigned until the hired Naples

"MR. BRANDON, MY MEN WILL PUT YOU ON YOUR OWN BOAT! I WILL BRING THE LADIES OFF!"—*Page 285.*

pleasure boat tossed idly upon the oily waves a half cable's length away.

When the pinnace of the stranger boat touched the side of the "Santa Lucia," Landon's own boat was manned alongside.

Striding across the deck, the young Pasha said, "Mr. Brandon, my men will put you on your own boat! I will bring the ladies off!"

"I'll not submit! I'll not submit!" he roared.

"Then, sir," coldly said Landon, "I will publish to the world the fact that you sought only your own safety, and let the two helpless women shift for themselves! *You are a pattern coward!"*

Without another word, Brandon jumped into the skiff, and was swiftly rowed to the other cutter! "I wish to sail at once," he howled when a hundred yards separated them.

Stepping lightly aft, Sidney Landon called to Mrs. Melville: *"It is time to go!* I will put you on your own boat! You will find a decent little hotel at 'La Marina Grande.'

"I recommend a good night's sleep on shore—and that you both take the steamer for Naples,

and let that picked-up pleasure boat follow home without you! The crew are incompetent fools."

Silently, and with downcast eyes,—Agnes Hawthorn clung to Landon's arm, as supported by Gertrude Melville, she tottered to the pinnace.

The fair face looked pinched and ghastly, peeping out of its rough sailor capote, and the golden hair clung in graceful wreaths around her stately head.

Not a word was spoken as they reached the side of "La Aguila de Oro."

Gertrude Melville's face flushed crimson as Landon handed them over the side.

With a truculent scowl, Robert Brandon clasped his drooping charge in his arms.

The quick-witted Consular lady saw that Sidney Landon would not willingly step upon the deck of the hulking coward's boat. The boatmen were already loosening the yacht's sails.

Gertrude Melville's face was flushed in very shame as Agnes Hawthorn stood there as if transfixed, gazing mutely at the man who had saved her from the fanged rocks of the Capri shore. "You will come to us at the Hotel Bris-

tol," Gertrude cried. "You will let us thank you! I must also reward your brave servant."

"I am leaving Italy at once," coldly said Landon, his form stiffening into the soldier's attention.

"But, your address, we can write," pleaded Gertrude, with hopeless tears welling into her eyes.

"You owe me nothing,"—gravely said Landon. "I have waited a year for a letter which never came!"

Agnes Hawthorn started forward as if she would speak, but Brandon's rancorous voice broke in: "I can allow no communication of my niece with a man who was disgracefully dismissed from the Army and blackballed as a blackguard from the Cercle de Rome.

"A man who was driven to resign by the United States Minister and who fled from Rome."

Landon leaped from the frail skiff and grasped the dotard's arm, wrenching it till he writhed in pain.

"You think yourself safe here!" he cried. "I shall come to Rome and make you eat those

words before the Minister himself, if I have to drag you by the heels!"

"For God's sake! Listen! *There has been a terrible mistake!*" murmured Agnes Hawthorn, as she laid her chilled hand upon the young man's arm.

"*You know why I left Italy!*" he sadly said, as he turned, leaped into his boat, and was swiftly rowed away.

Then the heiress tottered and fell back into Gertrude Melville's arms.

"*What did he mean?*" she murmured. "He surely received my letter!"

The boat gathered headway, and soon Landon's yacht was seen afar, a white-winged rover of the deep, heading toward Sorrento!

The two women cowered in the cabin of "La Aguila" with their eyes fastened upon the receding silver sail, as they were speeding on to Marina Grande.

"It is a world of lies," moaned Agnes Hawthorn.

"He must have received my letter,—and,—yet, —I owe him now an added debt which never can be paid! *Shame—shame!*"

That night in the Hotel Gran Brettagna, the unhappy women lived over the wretched year whose harvest had only been unhappiness.

Their door was resolutely locked, and the humiliated Brandon panted for the morning when the steamer would bear him back to his "alter ego" at the Hotel Bristol, in Naples.

He knew that his conduct had been that of a cur, and,—he feared the deadly light on Sidney Landon's face.

"My God! If he follows it up,—what may not happen? I must get back and warn Clark." He had seen the pitiless wrath upon Landon's stern face! The ass had brayed once too often.

"*I shall leave Italy instantly,*—Gertrude," said Agnes Hawthorn, as she buried her glowing face on her friend's bosom and burst into bitter tears.

A sudden happy thought thrilled her friend's agitated bosom.

"If there has been wrong, I will set it right! The Consul at Naples will surely aid me! The Naples boatmen will all know where the 'Santa Lucia' is harbored!"

Gertrude Melville called back the grave flash of Landon's eye as he leaped upon Brandon. "There

has been some hideous wrong done here," she mused. "And I shall right it, God helping me! That man is no craven,—no scoundrel! There is truth and honor in his eyes!"

Pacing his walk under the silvery olive groves of Sorrento that night, Sidney Landon suddenly called his valet to his side. "Get all ready to lock the place up for a month. Pay off and furlough the yacht's crew! We are going out into the gay world!

"I go to Naples, Rome, perhaps Nice and Marseilles! We leave in the morning! Pack all my traps! And get me now clipped and shaved 'en militaire!' I am a Pasha no longer!"

All that long night the soldier dreamed of the blue waves of the Grotto, where under the somber-arched roof he struggled for the life of the golden-haired darling who lay a helpless Undine, a silver Naiad Queen, on his shoulder!

CHAPTER XII.

UNEXPECTED ALLIES.

As the touch of the Fairy Prince woke the sleeping Beauty from her trance of years, so the words of sweet Agnes Hawthorn roused Sidney Landon from the morbid death in life of the last year. He forgot all its bitter harvest of sorrows.

He only remembered the young goddess with her half outstretched arms crying, *"Listen! For God's sake! There has been some terrible mistake!"*

Landon was awake at dawn, and, walking in his garden, gazed out upon the heaving bosom of the blue gulf.

The fisher's children were singing in the rocks at play, the silver sails of the fishing boats flecked the sapphire zone, and his heart bounded as he gazed at the happy islands hovering far out at sea.

> "Here, Ischia smiles, o'er liquid miles,—
> And yonder,—bluest of the skies,—
> Calon Capri waits, her sapphire gates,—
> Beguiling to her bright estates."

A bird broke out near him, singing in a blossomed tree,—the song went into his soul and a

fierce new delight in life, a fever of delicious unrest took possession of him.

For the first time he realized the concrete power of money.

"I am rich now. I can fight a good fight. I have 'the sinews of war!' She shall know all, and then, I will leave My Lady Disdain, but *not in shame!*

"As for Robert Brandon—," he turned and sped into the house.

Jack Haddon was already bustling around, and, at nine, when Sidney Landon stepped into his carriage, he directed the van to follow with the luggage to Parker's Hotel, at Naples.

The sturdy valet, Haddon, was gaily humming an old regimental war song as he watched the new light upon his master's brow. *"Aye,"* he chirruped. *"There's nothing like a lass to wake a man up!* There'll be rich fun soon! The marster's a proper young swell enough now!"

It was true that Landon was reproduced as the glass of fashion and the mould of form in that ultra English "style" which is considered strictly "High Life" by the continental nobility.

Landon gazed back at "Sorrento le gentile."

He had found peace and nepenthe,—"sweet surcease of sorrow,"—among those fragrant groves of lemon and orange lining the cliffs of Torquato Tasso's natal town.

He gaily waved his handkerchief as the captain of the "Santa Lucia" dipped the Khedive's flag to the metamorphosed Pasha.

As the carriage rolled along he mentally canvassed the situation. "There's Morgan,—there's also game Charley Hollingsworth! I'll confide only in them! Hollingsworth will soon dig up the secret of the Club infamy.

"I think that I will drop the trap over Signore Jacopo Maspero, *now!* It will take me about a month to communicate with Colonel Atwater, and, *then,* I will face his High Mightiness, Minister Van Buren Hartford."

One side of the case presented delicate features. "Melville has been but a faint-hearted friend! But, for Gertrude's sake,—for very gratitude, I must leave him out of the row! He only lives in his dabbled blues and yellows, his faded grays and his splotched crimson lake!

"At any rate, I can save him from future loss,

perhaps even shame, by unmasking this Roman wolf Maspero."

The ferret-eyed Haddon keenly watched his young master, as the train sped on from Castellamare to Naples.

"He 'ave the look of a hunting cheetah in his eyes, now! Blow me! There's somethink up!" mused Haddon, as he gathered the traps together when the train reached the station.

Landon had forgotten all the superb panorama of the pictured shore.

He saw not Vesuvius, hovering there a mighty menace of Nature, "with outstretched hands, o'erlooking the volcanic lands,"—buried Pompeii, revisiting the glimpses of the moon,—sad Herculaneum, still entombing the luxurious community who mutely died, and the unequaled sweep of that bay, whose proud motto is "Vedere Napoli e poi, morire."

He was now on the trail of his secret enemies at last,—and no lean Sioux ever crouched more tiger-like in the path of the headlong Pawnee braves than Landon, now for the first time scenting the traitor's path encircling his way in life.

"*I'll scatter the wolf pack!*" he swore in his angered heart.

"*Faster, faster,*" urged Landon, as the carriage sped down the Rue Vittorio Emanuele toward "Parker's."

He feared now that Robert Brandon might have sneaked over from Capri and taken the morning train for Rome.

"By Heavens! *he* shall face the music *now,*" cried Landon, as his spirit burned within him.

No sooner had he registered at Parker's than he dispatched the acute Haddon on a reconnoissance to the Hotel Bristol.

He was seated in the courtyard, under the lime trees, enjoying a cigar, when a handsome fellow in the undress uniform of the United States Navy tripped over the tall soldier's loosely extended legs.

"Harry Wainwright, by all that's holy!" cried Landon, leaping to his feet.

In ten minutes, the two chums were deep in the reminiscences of the fifteen years, since the one left Annapolis,—and the other,—gaily said good-bye to "Benny Havens, oh."

They had sampled the choicest brands of the

cellar before spry Jack Haddon glided into the courtyard.

"Party just in on steamer from Capri, sir. Ladies resting. Tickets bespoke for the evening train. The gentleman have just gone up to Castel St. Elmo, with a hotel shouter, to see the old fort."

"Get me a good dog whip, a good stout one," cried Landon. "Have a carriage at the door at once, the best you can get!

"See here, Wainwright," said Landon, his eyes gleaming with a newly aroused passion. "I want you as a witness to a little matter here."

"Fire away, my boy. I'm with you," cheerily said Wainwright. "If it's anything serious I can send off to the 'Kearsarge' and get another of our officers!"

"Oh, you'll do, you restless old fire eater," laughed Landon. "I only wish you to look on!"

In five minutes Haddon had returned. *"'Ere's the best I could do, sir!"* he whispered, handing his master a snaky looking contrivance of water buffalo hide.

"Haddon, you're a jewel," calmly remarked

Landon. "Get us a bundle of good cigars and a flask of cognac! Look alive now!"

Wainwright eyed Landon curiously as the carriage slowly climbed the Monte Santo.

He turned when they reached the gates of old St. Elmo.

Far below them lay the unrivaled amphitheater of old Rome's sin-haunted dens of summer luxury.

The forts of Castello dell' Oro,—Nuovo,—del Carmine, and Capuano, flew the Italian flag, while Britain's blood-red banner burned over a huge ironclad, and the star flag fluttered over the saucy Kearsarge, waiting yet to lay her bones on the white-fanged reef of Roncador.

Haddon had slipped into the old keep; and soon came gliding back. *"He's coming out, now, sir*—this 'ere's his carriage!"

"Take that fellow over and give him a bottle of wine," carelessly said Landon, tossing his factotum ten lire.

Lieutenant Commander Wainwright laughed merrily as he lit a fresh cigar. "Cutting off the enemy's retreat. Say, old man,—*be quick about*

it! I'm going over at three to Pompeii with Col onel and Mrs. Atwater."

Sidney Landon leaned back in the carriage as Robert Brandon came hulking over the lowered drawbridge. He gazed around for his missing carriage, and, while the cicerone went one way, Brandon hastened down the winding roadway.

"*Quick, quick,*" cried Landon. "Do you mean Miles Atwater of the Grays?"

"*Certainly,*" calmly said the astonished naval officer. "Didn't you know that Mary Atwater was my cousin?"

"*Thank God!*" cried Sidney Landon. "*Just the man!* They are unexpected allies! Where are they?"

"At the Bristol, of course," proudly replied Wainwright. "They are visiting me, and are going to take a cruise over to Tripoli on the old sea dog!"

"See here, Wainwright. That's the chap! Drive right down to him! I'll head him off! Don't get out of the carriage. Just be a witness though to what he says! *That's all!*"

While Wainwright urged the carriage on, Sidney Landon, leaping nimbly down the tables of

the slope, cut off the further progress of Mr. Robert Brandon.

The slanderer turned pale when he saw the metamorphosed Landon. In his craven heart, he felt that his victim had turned upon him at last. He essayed to pass, but Sidney Landon's hand was on his collar now, with a vise-like grip.

Wainwright gazed down in passive wonder from the victoria, halted so as to cut off the artist's flight.

"Gad! The fellow's twice his size," mused Wainwright, gazing at Landon's idle right hand holding the doubled up buffalo hide blacksnake.

Landon's face was white with wrath as he slowly brought out his sentences. "You said, sir, before ladies,—yesterday,—that I had been dismissed the United States Army,—blackballed as a blackguard from the Cercle de Rome,—and forced out of the Consular service by your protector, the Minister Resident!

"*Now, sir,* I want your authority for each one of those damned, craven lies! *Quick, too!*"

It was ill done in Brandon to try to swing his huge bulk back!

With a merciless swish, the whip caught him

full in the face, the red blood leaping into the triple welt!

"That for the army lie!" almost shrieked Landon.

Again the whip descended, while Brandon yelled with pain. The lash cut a strip from his coat sleeve!

"That for the club lie, you brute,—and, that. *for the story about the Minister!"*

Cowering and bleeding, Brandon begged for mercy.

"I ought to shoot you like a dog here, you cur! You have stabbed me behind my back, when lying at the point of death! *Only your wife saves your life!* And, hark ye! *Bridle her tongue!* Now, you coward,—*out with it!* Your authority for the first."

The lash came down again before Brandon, in sheer terror, murmured:

"Clark had letters; he showed them to my wife!"

"And she showed them all over Rome, you sneaking character thief!" yelled Landon, as he flogged the brute's shoulders.

"That for her social assiduity! Your back is broad enough!"

"Now, sir! *The Club story!*"

Brandon clutched Wainwright's knees, and begged, "Save me! By God! I'll tell all!"

"*Tell it,—to me,*" cried Landon, his wrath possessing him like a demon.

"It was Montaverde—the Italian nobleman!"

"And, you never went to Hollingsworth or Pallavinci to find out the truth? You claim to be an American! You knew that my name was shoved in there as a mere idle compliment! *Damn you!* I'll drag you to Montaverde—and, he will prove you a liar! You were paid,—to take this damned scandal in commission.

"And, *now, sir,* my dismissal by the Minister Resident! Did he or Melville tell you that?

"Did you ever ask Morgan to show you my dispatches resigning, or the return dispatches of the Department?"

Nothing was heard but Brandon's jibbering cries for mercy! Landon, in disgust, threw his whip over the edge of the cliff! He held up Brandon's craven head to gaze into his eyes!

"I am coming back to Rome! If by the time

I get there you have not publicly withdrawn all these stories, both at the American Club,—to Melville and to Hollingsworth,—I will post you as a liar, a coward, and a slanderer, and tell the story of your leaving two helpless women to drown in the Blue Grotto! *Off with you!"*

With a last powerful shove,—Landon sent the coward tumbling head over heels, and signed to Jack Haddon to mount the box.

They drove rapidly down the hill, while Haddon murmured, under his breath:

"Aunt Maria! But, 'e got it on his nob! 'E h'ain't much of a fighter,—that 'un."

When the carriage stopped at Parker's, Landon held out his hand to Wainwright and laughed:

"You're a good silent witness!

"Now, Atwater is my old Colonel! I'll send you up in the carriage to the Bristol! I will follow in ten minutes. Don't let them leave till I come! Tell Miles and his wife that I must see them for a few moments, before they leave for Pompeii."

"You're a little bit of a fire-eater, yourself, my boy!" laughed Wainwright. "I'll bet ten dollars

there's a pretty woman behind all this ferocity of yours!"

But Landon only shook his head in a gloomy silence.

"He deserved all he got!" was his only remark.

Fifteen minutes later, Sidney Landon was clasped in the bear hug of Colonel Miles Atwater!

The sturdy, solid old soldier danced around his newly found "lost lamb," while matronly Mary Atwater sat there, with tears of happiness in her clear, brown eyes!

"We thought you were in the Orient, or God knows where," puffed Colonel Miles, as he proceeded to mix a cavalry toddy.

"And you must come and stay here. Gertrude Melville is here, with some friends, the Brandons, and a young lady."

While the Colonel of the "Grays" impartially divided the results of his cavalry toddy making, the ex-Pasha led Mrs. Mary Atwater aside.

"You must go in and tell Mrs. Melville that I must see her *alone,* here, this afternoon, in your rooms, *while you go away to Pompeii!*"

Landon's grave face alone kept the good army wife from thinking that he had lost his wits!

"I need *you* and *Miles,* to-night," he said.

"This is the turning point of my life! You see, I can not go into the Brandon's apartments.

"I have just thrashed him, for a slanderer, within an inch of his life!

"Now, he will try to sneak his party out, back to Rome, this evening, but I must see her!

"Bring her in here, and I will speak to her before you!"

When the two gentlemen drained their glasses to the old frontier toast, *"How?"*—Landon said simply:

"Miles, I have just fallen into a million dollars! My uncle in St. Louis, of whose existence I was unaware, has done this neat little trick of financial legerdemain for me!

"Poor fellow! I'm sorry to say that he does not need it any more! I'd divide his own money with him if he were alive!"

"See here, Sidney," jovially cried the Colonel. "We never had a dollar in the Grays that we did not have to fight the paymaster for!

"You've got to come back to us, that's clear,—you imitation Jay Gould! We will let you pre-

sent us a decent set of band instruments. *Something that we never had!"*

And Miles Atwater drained his glass, pulled out his sheer sweeping mustache, and gazed fondly at his crack Captain!

"The offer of the President still holds good. Poor old Rufe Hatcher is wearing half mourning for you, still!"

"It all depends upon Mrs. Mary and yourself, now, but keep my good fortune a profound secret, as yet," cheerfully replied Landon. *"I'll tell you all to-night!*

"Yes! There is another,—*one other person!"*

"Great Scott! The thing is done, then," roared Atwater, as he grasped Landon in his brawny arms.

"We are all right, and I think you can answer for 'the other person!' "

"Not yet,—*not so surely,"* laughed Landon, as Mrs. Atwater glided back silently into the room.

"Miles," said she. "Go down and wait for Lieutenant Wainwright! I will join you in a few moments. You must not miss this excursion!"

"I will move up here from Parker's to-morrow, Commandante," gaily cried Landon, as the Colonel filled his two cigar cases, grasped his tourist umbrella, and departed with a sly wink to his rediscovered Senior Captain.

"You were right, Sidney," murmured Mrs. Miles. "The whole party is going home to-night! Poor Mr. Brandon had 'a frightful fall out of the carriage,—up at Saint Elmo,' and his wife has gone to him down at the station! He is already in the coupe lit of the train, with a Doctor."

"*That's his story, is it,*" coldly remarked Landon. "He is a glib liar!

"Well, Miss Hawthorn shall know nothing of it, but, Gertrude Melville must know all, and, to-night,—you and Colonel Miles will agree with me that I did right.

"Trust me, dear Madonna; your heart will be with me in the work I have to do! It is for the honor of the dear old Grays."

"I did not tell you that Lieutenant Colonel Prindle retires next month!" said Mrs. Atwater.

Sidney Landon grasped both the dear kindly hands and kissed them.

"Then, when he leaves the Regiment, I *may*

come back to it, but, I make no promises until you know all!"

Sweet-faced Mary Atwater noiselessly left the room, while Landon murmured:

"Poor old Black Bill! He has had a hard row to hoe, with the implacable Dora as his spouse! If God would only take her to His bosom!"

But, Landon sprang to his feet, forgetting all as the pale-faced Gertrude Melville followed Mrs. Atwater into the room.

"Before you go, dear Aunt Mary," said the ex-Pasha, with an affectionate smile, "I wish to say that my whole future depends upon you two true hearts—so, that after each has helped me in her own way,—you can tell each other all you know,—but, not now! Leave Gertrude Melville to me to-day, as a beloved sister!"

"We may hold your future in our keeping, Captain Landon," said the fair Gertrude, "but your happiness you will yet owe to the woman who has just told me, through her tears,—'I dare not meet him! I owe my very life to him, and I have wrecked his happiness!' "

"I only wish," gravely answered Landon, "to

set my honor right before the world! Then,—*I drop out of her life forever!* I shall go back into the army, and try and die under the colors of the old Regiment!"

The overjoyed Mary Atwater threw her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"And you'll be Major of your old Battalion! *The President has promised!*"

The stentorian voice of Miles Atwater was heard below, loudly calling for his "winsome marrow," and Mrs. Melville was left alone with the still excited soldier.

"Why do you avoid Agnes Hawthorn, Sidney?" the graceful woman said, seating herself at his side, as he dropped his head into his hands.

"I shall right my honor,—I shall trace out this cabal of damning wickedness, and then,—put the seas between us!" sadly cried Landon. *"She has a marble heart!"*

"A marble heart," echoed the spirited woman, springing up, her silken hair loosening and falling over her shoulders in a glorious cascade!

"How far would you have a woman stoop to show her heart, waiting with its opened doors?"

"Listen," cried Landon, in an agony of pain

and doubt. "I waited a whole week at Nice, when I wrote her that her slightest word would call me back to Rome! *I would have told her all!* I could have gone on to Egypt by Brindisi! *Oh! the hell of that week of doubt!* I haunted the Post and Telegraph! Not a word! Silence, —*the silence of contempt!*

"But, that Stone had organized my expedition up the Nile, I would have killed myself there, —but, I would then have been ranked a coward who feared the Abyssinian spearmen!"

A strange light shone in Gertrude Melville's eyes!

"Tell me what you propose to do?" she said, her bosom heaving with a new and strange emotion. "I have thrashed the truth out of this dog Brandon here to-day! I know now who is behind one of the lies! I will settle with that person,—*myself!*"

His face was as hard as flint.

"But you, Gertrude Melville, are the man of your family! You have a gallant heart! I shall confer with the Atwaters and follow you up to Rome.

"I shall go to Frascati or Tivoli, and call Mor-

gan and Hollingsworth to me. Arthur Melville *must,* himself, as well as Minister Hartford, fully and openly make it clear to all Rome that I resigned, *voluntarily,*—that the State Department telegraphed back and begged me to reconsider.

"This grave wrong must be publicly set right! If it is not done,—I shall publish in the Roman papers my telegram and letter of resignation, and the telegrams and dispatches of the Department!

"If either of these officials refuse, I shall certify the whole matter up to the Secretary of State himself, and request that the Department write to the Italian Bureau of Foreign Affairs and vindicate me, and I shall insist upon being presented to King Humbert!"

"It is the least that you could ask," cried the indignant Gertrude. "Clark's veiled influence is behind Hartford's ungentlemanly treatment of you! I heard all from Morgan,—and,—even that spider Maspero has helped to ruin you.

"Oh! If Arthur were only more practical! But I will engage that this is done, and that the Hartfords give an official dinner for you, with all the Legation and Consular Staff."

Landon's brow lightened.

"God bless you," he softly said. "The club matter Hollingsworth and I will handle,—and all Rome shall ring with that! I can handle that easily!

"The *other* matter must be met by the President reappointing me in the Army,—but not until the whole slander has been probed.

"Only the Atwaters can aid me in that."

"If you only knew Agnes Hawthorn's heart,—if you would only clear up the mystery of Ethel Raynor!" cried Gertrude.

"It is that which has torn the darling girl's bosom! The letters shown her were so convincing,—coming from the wife of a high officer in your own Regiment! The story was so heartless, so——"

"Stop, stop," whispered Landon, his face as white as marble. "No one shall speak of the dead! Let them defame the living! I begin to see the trail of the serpent! It will take two months to unseal the past, and, then, I shall face Agnes Hawthorn with the truth. *She has suffered?* God! I have been mad for a year!

"And she alone shall have the truth! *How* I left the army in perfect honor, the whole social

world here shall know,—*why* I left the army, no one but Agnes Hawthorn ever shall know!

"But I will lay the lash of punishment upon those who have come between us! The name of the informant was Mrs. Dora Prindle?"

Landon read the truth in Gertrude Melville's eyes.

Two hours later, he escorted the bright-hearted woman back to her own apartment! He paused at the door.

"Give her *this*," he said, handing Gertrude a little parcel. "Morgan will privately tell you of my movements. I shall know all. I will be at Frascati or Tivoli until your husband and the Minister have acted!

"Then, I will come to Rome for justice and vengeance!"

Two loving women wept on each other's bosoms when Agnes Hawthorn opened the little packet! Her golden ring and filmy lace handkerchief were there!

But they never knew that the withered violets lay on the soldier's breast when he faced the mad Abyssinians at Gura,—and—that they were still

resting there, while the orphaned heiress sobbed, *"It is all over! I can never see him again!"*

Both ladies wondered, as two magnificent bouquets were handed into their carriage as they drove to the station! Gertrude's was a mass of blush roses, but Miss Hawthorn's was a superb cluster of Parma violets, an offering fit for a prince!

The orphaned beauty avoided her friend's eyes as she read the mute message of the flowers!

It was after midnight when the Atwaters finished their long council of war with Landon.

"I am with you to the death," cried the hearty old Colonel. "I'll write poor Black Bill a letter to-night! By Gad! He shall certify the truth to me!"

And then, Landon broke the silence of years and wrote one letter to America to the only human being who knew the story of Ethel Raynor!

"For your dead daughter's sake, *speak now!*" he implored.

CHAPTER XIII.

JACOPO MASPERO'S CONFESSION.

Five days later, all Naples was familiar with the very merriest quartette of its forastieri.

The stalwart blue-eyed Wainwright was a nautical Apollo, whose curling brown hair, laughing glances and springy step betokened the ideal sailor.

Miles Atwater's fifty-five years sat lightly on him. His piercing dark eye, stocky build, sternly good-humored face and close-cropped locks "en militaire," with the wiry cavalry mustache, the pride of the Grays, all spoke of the old soldier.

Mrs. Mary Atwater, "discrètement vetue,"—gazed out with her beautiful brown eyes under an unruffled brow.

A notable beauty in her girlhood, the Colonel's wife had the sober matronly air of the veteran army wife.

Still handsome at forty-five, her voice was sweet and low as the summer wind.

Many a poor soldier in the hospital had listened to its soft accents while tossing in the hospital

under the delirium of the wounds of Indian lance and Sioux bullet.

Friend and associate of the pretty girl wives who came to reinforce the "Grays,"—all ignorant of the sad realities of the frontier,—she was "Aunt Mary" to the whole Regiment, "with malice towards none, with charity to all!"

It was only when Landon had led them a merry dance from the Museo Borbonico to Paestum,—and after a Grand Ball in her honor on the glory-hallowed "Kearsarge,"—that the ex-Pasha determined to move up to his chosen entrenchment at Frascati.

The whole story of the year, with its harvest of sorrow, was known now to the three friends!

It was a merry party of adieu at the Railway Station. Jack Haddon had been sent forth, "a dove out of the ark," to a secret conference with Mr. Charles Hollingsworth at Rome, and also to post Edwin Morgan upon the location of his friend's social headquarters.

This conscience-stricken Tommy Atkins was greatly cheered by Pasha Landon's promise to have Colonel Stanton, H. B. M., courtly military attaché at Rome, get him a full pardon for the

desertion which had sullied his name after eleven and a half years of a twelve-year enlistment!

"'Twas this how," honestly confessed the sturdy Briton. "Rum got me left on my troop ship, an' a pretty Italian lass, at Port Said, made me forget 'the Old Lady of Windsor' until it was too late to compromise with Her Majesty, so I cut stick, han' become a bloomin' Hegyptian sodger! *That's how.*"

When the first bell rang, Harry Wainwright drew Landon aside.

"Go back to the service, my boy. A dismounted cavalryman is like an eagle waddling on the earth, a being shorn of all his glory.

"I've watched the men who left the Navy,—just flopping around helplessly, like fishes out of water!

"With your money, you can illustrate and adorn the Grays! So, go up and make Rome howl! I think," he grinned, "you'll find it pretty clear of your enemies when you 'shy your castor into the ring.'"

Mrs. Mary Atwater led the young soldier aside.

"*Sidney!*" she whispered, laying her kindly white hand upon his arm. "*Come back to us!*

You know the only disturbing element soon leaves us! God help poor Colonel Prindle! He is a good, blunt old soldier! He has borne the cross of a bitter-tongued wife for years! You will be righted! Poor 'Black Bill,' the men are going to give him a testimonial to show that they hold him guiltless. Dora was worn into a social madness by envy and their long-delayed promotion."

"Poor old Prindle," sighed Landon. "But nothing can restore me these blackened years—or undo the work of that cruel woman's hand."

But, cheery Miles Atwater crushed Landon's sword hand in his mighty grasp.

"You are under orders to report within six months at the headquarters of the Grays,—we regard you as the 'Knight of the Golden Armor,' now!

"We cavalrymen do not know much, but we know a good thing when we see it, and we propose *to keep it!*

"Drop the Pasha, and come home and have a race with the Cheyenne dog soldiers, and the Sioux braves! They all know you,—'Young Chief who rides ahead of his Troop.'"

It was only a half promise which Sidney Lan-

don gave as the half crazy Italian conductor blew his little bird pipe, and waved him in to the car with much wild gesticulation.

Landon passed a telegram over to Jack Haddon at Terracoria.

"You seem to have made a good choice," he remarked. It was from Charley Hollingsworth, and read:

"Have secured apartments, selected by your valet, in Villa Piccolomini,—best in Frascati. Morgan and I will meet you there, noon to-morrow."

Sidney Landon's heart was gay, as he left the Naples railway carriage next morning, at Cianipino, and caught the local to Frascati.

As the little train climbed the hill, towards old Tusculum, Sidney Landon gazed back at Rome, where his banded enemies were now agitated over the rumored coming of "the worm that had turned."

The soldier's face hardened as he thought of Rawdon Clark's precipitate departure for Paris, for this news of moment was brought back by the ferret-eyed Haddon!

He was also furnished with Forrest Grimes'

Paris address, and the local habitat of the prosperous Frank Hatton, who was stationed for the summer at the Grand Hotel Hungaria, Buda Pesth, doing the Danube.

"I'll write to Forrest Grimes to keep a keen eye on Mr. Rawdon Clark. If I mistake not, he is the party who has the *longest* account to settle.

"And, by Jove, I'll send Haddon up to Florence to mail all my letters there, so that the Roman light-fingered gentry can not touch them. I'll send them all through the French Consul, 'recommandè' to Freycinet Frères. *That will do the business.*"

He had pondered for hours upon Agnes Hawthorn's strange remarks on the Aguila d' Oro!

In sweeping through the long tunnel he could again see the vaulted rocky dome of the Blue Grotto, with its ghastly infiltrated bluish light, its silvery breaking gleams under the plashing oar.

"*Strange, strange,*" he mused, "that of the whole wide world—this fairy basin, with its forty-foot ceiling, its oval of two hundred by one hundred feet should have locked me in a life and

death grapple with fate for the one fair woman of all the world!"

He could see that dear pale face resting on his shoulder — the silver crystal flood breaking around her beloved form, and the mirrored bottom, eight fathoms deep, where the fairy coral hides glittering starfish and the delicate sea anemone.

"It was as if Lurline and the naiads had given her back to me, in their fantastic sport with the mortals who intrude upon the water maiden's one Imperial bower."

He was dreaming of stern Tiberius, crowned with blood-red gold, watching his star-eyed favorites sporting in those silvery blue depths when the train halted under Monte Porzio.

In half an hour,—he was gazing out of the windows of his new abode upon the huge dome of St. Peter's, lifted high in air over the Leonine city.

Jack Haddon bestirred himself to arrange a breakfast of due delicacy for the "envoys from Rome," while Landon, after a shaking down of his effects, drove back to the station for his guests!

The dilettànte tourists stood aghast as Hollingsworth and Morgan fell upon the returned Abyssinian warrior, with shouts of joy.

Merrily the wheels rattled along, as the three friends were driven around the foliage-shaded winding road to the Villa Piccolomini.

Charley Hollingsworth's brow was big with mystery, but he rattled out a piece of information which brought peals of laughter from the ex-Pasha.

"I don't know what you've done to Robert Brandon, but that braying jackass seems bewitched. He is rushing around Rome, carrying in commission the very latest rumors in your case!

"I found him at the American Club telling a circle of a score of the 'old stand-bys' that your leaving the Consular service was *purely voluntary*, after all,—that you had been offered a high appointment in the Regular Army by the President,—and, that you only declined it to accept a secret Military Mission to Egypt of the gravest character.

"And," continued Hollingsworth, "the strangest thing of all is, that he has actually got from

Stilwell Meacham official copies of your application for leave of absence,—your resignation,—and the State Department's most complimentary dispatch to you, begging you to recall your telegraphed resignation, and offering you six months' leave of absence."

Landon laughed heartily as he escorted his guests to the quaint old reception hall of his mediæval apartment. He recalled the Egyptian boy's prescription for his donkey: *"Plenty of stick!"*

"Any further 'stir in Rome?'" gaily demanded Landon, as they sat down to Haddon's splendidly thrown together breakfast!

"Oh! yes!" gravely replied Charley Hollingsworth, who had been chattering of Landon's faithful ally, Elaine, and the two "cherubs," now the terror of young Rome, with their ingrained American devilment.

"All this hubbub of Brandon's was a day after the fair, for Minister Van Buren Hartford gave a formal dinner at the Legation, at which the Melvilles and all the leading Americans were present, as well as the English, French and German Ambassadors.

"I saw both Montaverde and Pallavinci on hand, too, spangled with decorations.

"Hartford publicly drank your health and spoke of your remarkable bravery at Gura,—and of your Pashaship, as well as the Grand Cross of the Medjidjie!

"He took occasion to nail both lies, the one that you had gone out of the service under any pressure, and, the other base rumor that he had asked you to resign."

Landon's face hardened to stone! He might have been an Indian on the war path waiting to bound out, tomahawk in hand!

Hollingsworth quietly added, "Hartford is a great political trimmer! He drew me aside and told me that he had been most damnably misinformed about you.

"I'll give him a chance to say that, *in person,* soon," grimly rejoined the cavalryman.

The trio passed a jolly couple of hours, until Edwin Morgan drew Landon aside and slipped a letter into his hand.

"I was told to give you this, *in private,*" he murmured, "and I've loads to tell you of Maspero. I think that he is getting ready for flight!"

"We must stop that. I need that scoundrel in the 'round-up,' " quickly said Landon.

Charley Hollingsworth, sauntering up, announced his intention of driving over alone to dine with the Princess Branciforte.

"She's one of my earliest Roman flames," the gay fellow said, "and she always claims me, when she can, for a dinner of memory,—a sort of 'funeral baked meats,'—of our Platonic fascination. You men have loads to say to each other."

Morgan wandered out into the garden to locate the "points de mire"—of the superb panorama, with Landon's signal glasses,—while the agitated soldier eagerly broke the seal of Gertrude Melville's letter. His hands trembled as he read the fateful lines:

"Agnes is here with me, and insists that I shall convoy her on to London, where she has taken a house for the season with Mrs. De Peyster Van Cortlandt.

"All has been one series of strange surprises since we returned. Mrs. Brandon has locked herself from the world since her husband's disgrace. Stories of the fracas have been wafted up from

Naples by the hotel porters and returning tourists.

"The facts are generally known now,—though the causes are as yet faintly hidden.

"But I have learned from Agnes that it was Mrs. Brandon who showed her the letters from America, blackening your name. *They are now in Mrs. Brandon's possession.* Agnes has discharged her companion, Mrs. Agatha Waring, and I have prevailed upon Arthur to escort us to London together. Elaine Hollingsworth will take Elsie, and I shall put Mr. Morgan in charge of our home!

"There are two terrible things to tell, and I hesitate for very shame.

"Rawdon Clark forced himself upon Agnes at the Hotel Costanzi, and, after receiving a definite dismissal,—then broke out into a foul tirade of abuse.

"He assailed her, with all the bitterness of a madman: 'You met this sleek adventurer, Landon, at the tomb of Cecilia Metella,—your half-blind old duenna Montgomery was bribed to play propriety—and, when surprised in your love-

making,—he shot the poor, unarmed peasant who stumbled upon you!

"'Only by threats of the police did the unmasked rascal clear out, at last!'

"And, shame upon shame,—that very night,—the night he left for Paris, a messenger placed in my husband's own hands an anonymous letter:

"'Your wife could not let her secret lover, Landon, go away without meeting him once more at the Fontana di Trevi! *You have been a hoodwinked fool!* Ask her if she went to the Princess' ball! And,—ask her *who* was with her,—*who* covered her daring intrigue! Perhaps your own waiting women can tell you! If you want the name of the coachman,—the number of the carriage,—you shall have it! Fool! Drop the scales from your eyes! Leave your painting garret and watch over your home! And,—this fellow, Landon, laughs over these intrigues! He left a wide swath in Rome! A military Don Juan!'

"Now, Arthur Melville is the soul of honor,—the mirror of manliness,—though often led into an easy, self-forgetfulness by his artistic nature.

"I have seen the nobility of my husband's na-

ture in his one remark: *'Gertrude,—a grievous wrong has been done to Landon!'*

"As to the letter, he placed it in my hand without a word! I think it better you should not see Agnes until you have wrenched the truth from all these hidden enemies.

"The letter in Mrs. Brandon's hands she will not dare to destroy.

"She will keep it to hold it over the one who hired her to betray her own relative! I think that you can guess the name!

"But, wait at Frascati till we return! You and I, and Morgan and the Hollingsworths, will trap these villains! Send any answer you wish, by Morgan!"

"I'll have that letter, if I give up my last drop of heart's blood," sternly said Landon, as he hid Gertrude Melville's communication in his bosom.

And, then, dismissing all his own cares,—he joined Morgan and learned the whole story of Jacopo Maspero's movements.

"I've had him most carefully watched," concluded Edwin Morgan, when he had unveiled all the doings of the year!

"He has been a secret lover of Emilia, Mrs.

Melville's confidential attendant! You know what a beautiful and resolute looking devil she is!

"Of course, he spied upon his master through her! But, of late, he has been lavishing money upon 'la Graziana,'—a handsome actress of the Tèatro Apollo!—and, now, Emilia is glooming alone around the Palazzo Vecchio.

"The other girl, Lucia, often joins the Graziana and Maspero in their little suppers.

"If you wish to bring this scoundrel Maspero up with a round turn, now is the time,—for, the Graziana goes to Paris, and, the office boy, Paolo, whom I have won over by using money as you directed, tells me that Maspero's luggage is all packed!

"He may be mad enough to follow her to Paris —and,—Clark is there! Paolo tells me that Clark and Maspero met often at the Hotel Quirinale."

Sidney Landon bounded to his feet! He clenched his fists in a sudden rage!

"When do the Melvilles leave for London?" he demanded.

"To-morrow night!" said the astonished Morgan!

"Then, Edwin," slowly said the soldier, "I will come down to Rome to-morrow evening. I will go to the Hotel Cavour,—near the railway station on the Via del Viminale.

"Meet me there at midnight. The Melvilles will be gone then, and you can bring any letter that Mrs. Melville may give you.

"Say nothing of my movements to any one.

"I will telegraph now to Colonel and Mrs. Atwater to come up to Rome, instantly.

"Now, I will go and write my letter to Mrs. Melville. When do you go down with Hollingsworth?"

"That depends upon the Princess Branciforte," laughed Morgan. "Eleven o'clock was the time agreed upon."

"Good," said Sidney Landon. "One last request: If Maspero shows any signs of flitting to-morrow, beg Arthur Melville to have him arrested as an embezzler at once! *Watch his rooms!* If the baggage goes out,—tell Melville that I have the proofs of the rascal's deeds! And, then, *telegraph to me,*—I will take the next train!"

And the two friends beguiled the hours until

dinner in wandering over the mundane paradise of Prince Torlonia.

They sat in the cool evening hours, under the watchful stars, awaiting the return of the gay troubadour, Hollingsworth, when a messenger dashed up on horseback, with a telegram for "Il Signore Sidney Landon, Villa Piccolomini."

The alert soldier tore open the blue folded strip and then yelled for Haddon, as he grasped his top coat and hat!

"Read that, Morgan," he huskily cried!

"Haddon! Catch the nearest carriage! We take the next train! You will wait here! See Mr. Hollingsworth off! Tell him he'll find me at the American Consulate, and to get there at once! *Tell him that something grave has happened!"*

Edwin Morgan was at Landon's side as the soldier sharply cried to his valet:

"Lock up all here! Bring my luggage and come down on the first morning train to the Consulate!"

In five minutes, the two men were dashing along to the station, repeating to each other the fateful words of Arthur Melville:

"Maspero fatally stabbed, by a woman, in the office, this evening. Come at once. He is lying here. He asks for you. Hasten. He will only last a few hours!"

"It is the beginning of the end," hoarsely cried Landon, as they leaped aboard the train.

Neither of the friends spoke while the little train rattled off its twelve miles.

But, once at the station in Rome, they leaped into a carriage, and that Roman Jehu well earned the golden twenty lire which dazzled his eyes.

As the two friends sprang out at the Palazzo Vecchio, they brushed aside a half dozen gens-d'armes who were guarding the lower entrance.

Up the stairway they hastened, to see the gleam of lights in the main Consular office, and, two armed men on guard at the door!

At a sign from Consul General Melville,—the gensd'armes dropped their crossed swords.

There were no words of welcome spoken as Sidney Landon hastened to the corner, where, extended upon a mattress, the wounded Italian lay upon the floor.

Doctor Cesare Corvini was on his knees beside the sufferer, watching there, with a glass of cordial in his hand.

And, at the other side of the dying man,—a priest knelt in prayer, while the crucifix and candles upon Maspero's desk told of the last solemn rites of the church.

As Landon bent over his secret enemy,—the Italian turned his dark, glittering eyes upon him with a hopelessly imploring gaze.

"*It is too late,*" he murmured. "You will not believe me! I intended to have told you all! Once at Paris with la Graziana,—I would have been safe.

"For this pitiful brute, Clark, denied me money, after I have slaved for him a year!

"I offered to tell him who was with la Signorina Melville, on that night at the Fontana di Trevi!"

Sidney Landon started back as the wounded man gasped:

"*I was the beggar whom you drove away.*"

"*And why did you hate me?*" quietly asked Landon, holding up a warning finger to Melville, as Doctor Corvini felt the weakening pulse.

"I knew that you had detected my robberies of the government funds. The boy Paolo told me

AT THE OTHER SIDE OF THE DYING MAN, A PRIEST KNELT IN PRAYER.—*Page 336.*

of you and Morgan secretly working over the books!

"And then, I thought if I could help Clark to blacken your name,—the one with the golden hair, up there at the Costanzio,—would throw you over, and,—*you would leave Rome!*

"Clark has worked day and night to crush you! He paid for your blackballing at the club. *Montaverde knows all!*

"Revenge me upon him, the miserly scoundrel, and—upon Brandon and his wife,—they were all in it! *Clark promised to make them rich!* Basta! Tutto è finito!

"In my desk," he gasped, "you will find a copy of your letter to the Signora Hawthorn,—I gave Clark one!

"I stole all your letters that I could! I paid for this at the Postoffice with Clark's money."

Landon's face betrayed his horror and disgust.

"Don't curse me! I am dying!" faltered Maspero. *"I was afraid of you!* I was led on at first by gambling to take a little, and,—*the Padrone was so easy,*—he never even looked at a paper! The one theft pushed the other on! And, too late, when I fell in Clark's hands, I saw

that he could always ruin me,—even from a distance—and,—*I could not strike back!* But one good deed I will leave behind! *She loves you!* The golden hair! There is her letter to you, when you wrote from Nice for her answer! She says:

"'*Come, come to me, at once! I am waiting for you,—with a loving heart!*'

"I would not give the letter to Clark, but, *he had a copy,* and—*he paid well for it!*"

"*How did you get that letter?*" solemnly demanded Landon.

"*Emilia stole it,* the damned witch, when she was sent to post it by the Signorina Melville, for the golden hair was in the house!

"I had to make love to Emilia to get her secrets for that scoundrel Clark—and,—it is her knife that has finished me!"

Melville had already opened Maspero's desk—and he silently handed a pocketbook to Landon.

"*All the other papers are gone!*" the dying man whispered. "I was going to run away as soon as the Consul left, for I could not live without the Graziana, and I intended to catch Clark in Paris and frighten him!

"*Dio mio!* For ten minutes, alone in a room with him, with a knife! And, now——"

His head fell back in a fit of violent coughing! They raised him up!

"There is fifteen hundred lire, sewed in my waistcoat," he muttered. "*Give them to Lucia!* She was my poor dupe. Poor girl! *She loved me,* and *I deceived her!* She was true to her mistress, until love made her—like me—*a fool!* Emilia,—*may she burn in hell*——"

His head fell back helplessly, and, with one long shuddering groan, the spirit passed!

When all the windows were opened, the crowd below knew that the Angel of Death had entered the great hall above them!

In half an hour, only the priest, on his knees, was guarding the body, lying there, with its arms folded over the breast, now stiffening in death.

Two gendarmes nodded, in their chairs, at the door, and a sentinel faced the long hall below!

A dozen squares away, Emilia Cataldo was wringing her hands and tearing her long, dishevelled hair in agony, for the jailer had put a death-watch in her cell.

"Your lover is dead," roughly said the brute, *"and, you—go to the piombi for life."*

It was long after midnight when Sidney Landon grasped the hands of Doctor Corvini and Arthur Melville!

"Pledge me," he said, "upon your honor that you will never repeat this poor wretch's disclosures. *Morgan has heard nothing!* Melville, let nothing keep you from hastening your wife and Miss Hawthorn over to London! Let Morgan guard your home! *I will stay in Rome until your return!*

"Vice Consul General Meacham will attend to the authorities. I will see this poor devil buried. Colonel Atwater will be here to-morrow, and we will see the Minister! The silence of the grave is all I ask! *My honor, alone, is concerned!"*

And when Charley Hollingsworth came dashing in, Morgan and the new comer could only escort Sidney Landon to the Hotel de Russie.

"Back to Rome, by a strange path," murmured Landon, when, with a bounding heart, he read the sweet avowal of Agnes Hawthorn, now a year old,—*"Shall we ever meet at the fountain?"*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DAY OF RECKONING.

Before noon, the next day, all Rome was ringing with the echoes of the sinister tragedy at the American Consulate General.

Gertrude Melville and her Rose in Bloom Elsie, with Miss Agnes Hawthorn, under the escort of Mr. Stillwell Meacham,—took the noon train for Florence in order to escape the horror of the proximity of the dead Deputy Vice Consul General.

There were the wildest rumors in the banking and trading fraternity, and a dozen familiar faces were suddenly missing from money mart and the "business parlors."

A hurried note of "good-bye" from Gertrude Melville found Sidney Landon at the Hotel de Russie, in close conference with Colonel Atwater, Edwin Morgan and Charley Hollingsworth.

The ex-Pasha trembled and turned pale when he opened the note sent by the Consul General's wife.

It read:

"Dear Sidney,—When this horror is over, come over to Paris and London and see me! *You must!*

"There is a duty laid upon me which I will not shirk! All must be made clear! Send me a note by Arthur, who follows us to-night!"

Out of that dainty pacquet fell a tiny golden ring, with the tell-tale inscription, "Agnes," and there was a folden silken paper, in which was enwrapped the lace handkerchief of the Queen of the Night at the Fontana de Trevi. And the gallant soldier's eyes were dim as he kissed the little golden ring.

It had been a stern and brief Council of War up there at the Hotel de Russie.

Morgan had brought along the frightened young wretch, Paolo, the office boy, who now confessed all of Maspero's ill deeds. Consular Clerk Morgan had the whole official proofs of Maspero's moneyed rascalities, and, too late, Arthur Melville cursed himself for taking over "a confidential man" from his easy-going predecessor.

Maspero's crimes varied from extorting double fees,—levying tribute on sales to tourists,—to false vouchers for increased office expenses,—and

thefts of hundreds of dollars monthly from the postal accounts of the huge office mail.

The postage stamps, regularly purchased, were duly returned and cashed through Paolo, less a ten per cent "rake off" to the cash clerk at the General Italian post office.

A number of special deposits of funds in the Consulate General had been vainly demanded of the bankers by the alert Morgan, who learned that these had been artfully withdrawn by the dead swindler. Maspero's perfect knowledge of all local formalities had enabled his frauds to be adroitly covered up.

"We must see the United States Minister, *at once,*" exclaimed Sidney Landon. "Melville, you and I, and Colonel Atwater (as my witness), will go to him at once.

"Morgan must bring the lad, who seems to have been terrorized by Maspero, and, under threats of losing his daily bread, been used as the cat's paw in all the dirty villainy!"

"*And I,*"—exclaimed Charley Hollingsworth, "will go to the jail and see the poor devil Emilia Cataldo. *I have known her for years!* She will tell me the whole story of Maspero's villainies.

Then, I have to attend an extraordinary meeting of the Cercle de Rome! There is a whirlpool of excitement in the Italian jeunesse dorée, for Pallavinci desperately wounded Montaverde in a duel last night!

"It seems that Montaverde made a personal canvass of the members of the Cercle de Rome, and then—upon Clark and Brandon's authority, spread the vile reports which led to the insult to Captain Landon!"

It was a decidedly mauvais quart d'heure for the Honorable Van Buren Hartford, when the Consul General ushered in the visiting party.

The awkwardness of the situation was accentuated by Lieutenant Colonel Landon, ex-Pasha, declining to take the Minister's offered hand, or to seat himself in the Legation.

"*I am only following Your Excellency's lead,*" he grimly remarked. "I have brought Colonel Miles Atwater here, as my witness, to have you publicly state that you know nothing derogatory to my official character. As to your personal opinion, sir,—*it is valueless!*"

Colonel Atwater engaged the embarrassed

Minister in conversation, until Landon again took up the pas de charge.

"I am leaving Rome, sir. I leave to you—Mr. Edwin Morgan, with this wretched boy in charge.

"Paolo's evidence, and Mr. Morgan's papers, will prove to you that this Consulate General has been robbed for years! I began to ferret out the villain's scoundrelism, but was called away before I had the final proofs!

"Mr. Morgan was ready to denounce and arrest him, in case of attempted flight, but, the Italian woman's knife has cut the Gordian knot.

"The local helplessness of this man's superiors in face of his craft, local affiliations and the help of all the meaner subordinates, as well as peculating petty bankers and thieving tradesmen only proves our need of a trained and intelligent Consular system.

"I did not wish to officially report this or involve Mr. Melville's administration until I had absolute proofs! Mr. Morgan has just completed them!"

Consul General Melville, with a grave face, then demanded to be officially relieved until such time as an Inspector of Consulates had been sent

by the Department to go over the whole matter.

The Minister was glad to be rid of his disturbing visitors. For very shame he dared not face Sidney Landon, whose cold scorn cut him to the quick! He dreaded the naming of his secret adviser and political backer, the Honorable Rawdon Clark, of the Elkhorn mine.

But Sidney Landon, standing like a duelist at the mark, only bowed formally, as the Minister announced the promotion of Edwin Morgan to Deputy Vice Consul General, and added to Melville: "I shall put my third attaché, Larue Livingston, in the Consulate General, to watch over your personal interests, until you return from London. I authorize you to take a fortnight's leave! I will personally see that justice is done."

The frightened Paolo was left in the charge of the Legation Interpreter, subject to the call of the Police, and the three gentlemen returned to the Hotel de Russie for their dèjeuner.

With a broken voice, Melville faltered his apologies to Sidney Landon for the outrages of the past.

"Say no more, dear Melville," cried Landon, with a glance at Atwater! "There are only two

to reckon with, *the active villains.* You were hoodwinked and wrought upon! But, my candid advice to you is either to personally superintend your office in future or—*else to throw it up!* You will be made the victim of some great blackguardism, unless you watch the Consulate!"

Both Atwater and Landon were relieved when Arthur Melville departed, having made a rendezvous at the Hotel Meurice in Paris and the Grand Hotel, London, with the two army friends!

"We have a little bit of business over there," grimly said Landon, "and so, we will bring you the news from Rome."

The comrades were enjoying the after-breakfast cigar when Morgan broke in upon them!

"Here are letters marked *'Important,'* " said the game fellow, "and I brought them up myself!"

"The Police officials have seized and sealed all Maspero's effects, and,—to-morrow, I begin a careful examination, with the officers of justice, of all the dead rascal's papers and belongings! His peculations show up a hundred thousand lire! *Where did it all go to?*

"La Graziana," suggested Sidney Landon.

"Right," mused the new Deputy Vice Consul

General. "She cleared out at daylight, leaving her maid to bring on her luggage. And,—the Police tell me that Emilia Cataldo is hopelessly insane! Poor wretch! She only raves of the Graziana, and screams her threats to murder her rival!"

When the faithful Morgan had departed, Landon said:

"Colonel Miles, now get ready for one serious stroke of business! All depends upon your staying power and ability to frighten the one who has been behind all this mischief."

While the good Colonel made himself ready—Landon glanced at his letters. He started up in surprise, as he read Forrest Grimes' brief note, and ran his eye over a heavily displayed newspaper slip sent on by the unwearying Hatton from Buda Pesth! Both letter and slip told of an impending controversy over the ownership of that inexhaustible treasure mine known as the "Elkhorn."

The allegation of a criminally changed survey, in the interest of Rawdon Clark and associates, —was lucidly set forth, with the final dictum, that a verdict against them in the U. S. Circuit

Court at Denver, would leave the alleged conspirators liable for the return of all the millions heretofore taken from the "Elkhorn."

"It is easy to see," wrote the sardonic Grimes, "*why* Clark wished to make sure of the orphaned millionairess! Agnes Hawthorn's future and social position would be a safe anchor to help him ride out this storm!

"I'm told by a Colorado newspaper man here that the Surveyor and land office officials have been heavily subsidized by Clark and his gang in the past!

"If they break on the trial, and let the cat out of the bag, then, Clark is not only a bankrupt but may have to take to his heels, as he has done all the heavy swearing himself. He is now in Paris at the Hotel Athenèe, waiting for the verdict, and, I'm told, that he has taken to drinking heavily,—and now abuses Miss Hawthorn, *openly*.

"He claims to have trapped her in some assignation! Q. E. D.—that she has given the dirty brute the congè! If I were near enough, I would wring his neck, *on general principles!*"

The last spark of mercy faded out of Sidney

Landon's chivalric heart, as he leaped into the carriage with Colonel Atwater!

The old veteran was got up in a heavy Prince Albert outfit of sombre magnificence, and his good gray head sported a glossy "tile."

"If she will not see us?" said the doubting Atwater.

"She must!" sternly said Landon, as they rolled along to the Great Emporium of Assisted Art.

It did not escape Landon's quick eye that all the curtains were dropped and the "persiennes" closed,—as their equipage rolled into the court-yard of Brandon's pretentious abode.

Robert Brandon had his weather eye out for squalls.

A half an hour was spent in "pourparlers" with the skillfully instructed servants at the door! The innate grace of Italian lying is an unattainable perfection to your raw Anglo-Saxon!

"Il Signore Brandon—ah, yes! He was away at Venice,—making his sketch of the Grand Canal for il Signore Clark's great picture, and would not return for a month!

"La Signora ill,—*very ill,*—absolutely unable to see anyone!"

"*Very good!*" finally rasped out Landon. "We will then stay here, in the carriage,—*all night!* It is a matter of life and death."

Another half an hour was spent in vainly fencing with the artful woman spy whom Myra Brandon had set on to delude the unsuspicious heiress. Mrs. Agatha Waring tried in vain to shield her artful "confederate."

At last, Colonel Atwater's temper gave way!

"*Madame!*" said he. "*I dislike to use harsh measures with a woman!* Mrs. Brandon knows very well what we have come here for, and, now, I tell you candidly, that we will not leave the house without it. A frank giving up of what we seek will prevent Lieutenant Colonel Landon and myself laying the whole matter, with our proofs, before the United States Minister here!

"Both Mrs. Melville and Mrs. Hollingsworth have seen the documents, which we know to be in Mrs. Brandon's possession!

"*Now, Madame,* the Melvilles and Miss Hawthorn are en route to Paris!

"A telegram will reach them at Meurice's to-

morrow, and,—*if that telegram is sent,* the further residence of Mr. and Mrs. Brandon in Rome will be an impossibility.

"I am an old man,—I will see Mrs. Brandon *alone.* She need not be humiliated with Lieutenant Colonel Landon's presence.

"But," his eyes flashed, "by the gods of War, *I'll give her just five minutes to see me,* and, *to hand over those papers!* She has the last chance to save herself, and her husband!"

He drew out his watch!

"If she does not yield, I will go up to the American Club and post Brandon publicly! *It's a case of touch and go!"*

While the adroit spy was absent, the two men studied the artistic misfits upon the walls!

Their agony was mitigated by the return of the frightened woman, who had been Agnes Hawthorn's treacherous guide.

One last imploring demand that the Brandons should be held scathless was granted, and, then, Sidney Landon, sternly sad, at this humiliation of womanhood, went apart with Mrs. Brandon's woman adjutant when the defeated schemer loitered into the room.

For five minutes, there was the sound of sobs and imploring demands. At last, Colonel Atwater entered the waiting room.

"*I have all the Dora Prindle letters,*" he gravely said; "*both of them,—the unsigned one,* and the *one* addressed *directly to Miss Hawthorn!* I recognize Mrs. Prindle's handwriting."

Colonel Landon stood at attention.

"I also want the letters signed by Barker Bolton, and Burton Wilmot! Mrs. Melville has told me of them! They were used to disgrace me with the Minister, and also with Miss Hawthorn.

"I *also* want a signed letter stating that Rawdon Clark gave Mrs. Brandon these letters, as a relative of Miss Hawthorn's, to read to her, so as to terminate our social acquaintance!"

After an hour of hysterics and stormy sorrow, the foolishly wicked woman, cornered at last, signed the paper, and tottered out of the room!

In a grave silence, the victors filed down stairs!

"*God help poor old 'Black Bill!*' This last disgrace will half kill him!" muttered the loyal old Colonel. "Prindle has been a good soldier! And,—my God! *what a cross he has carried!*"

"He shall be held harmless!" cried Landon, into whose eyes a cruel gleam had stolen. *"Give me the letters!"*

And, then, Landon's wrath broke loose as he gazed upon the artful slanders which had driven Agnes Hawthorn to scorn him!

"See here! Atwater," he grimly said. "I want you to leave your wife with the Hollingsworths! We will slip away from there, and catch the midnight train for Paris! Rawdon Clark shall not escape me, *this time!* He must not be warned by these lickspittles!"

Colonel Atwater nodded, and they only listened to the patter of the horses' feet as they raced back to the Hotél de Russie.

In the garden, Charley Hollingsworth awaited them!

"I've just returned from the Club meeting! You have been unanimously elected, Landon,—and Montaverde has been expelled for dishonorable practices against you!

"You and Atwater must now drive around and leave a card upon the officers and members. The whole town is ringing with the Maspero tragedy!

"His body has been removed by the Police

authorities! It's all in vain! The Cataldo is demented! Poor devil! Italian jealousy is a raging flood!"

In ten minutes, Hollingsworth understood the wishes of the avengers.

"Let me handle all," he said. "Mrs. Hollingsworth will come down here and take Mrs. Atwater up to dinner! I'll post Morgan! He will be of our party! Keep your rooms here! I'll send my man, Giuseppe, down here after dark for your sacs de voyage!

"While I go and post Morgan,—arrange your little affairs. Mrs. Hollingsworth will come down daily to Mrs. Atwater in your absence!

"You must keep your rooms, Landon, and I'll put you on the midnight train, in my carriage! I'll go and get you through tickets and coupè lits for Paris!"

In an hour, all was ready, and the three friends drove around to the Cercle de Rome.

Colonel Atwater's name was duly put up as a visitor, and Lieutenant Colonel Landon gravely paid his initiation fees and a year's dues.

A half an hour was spent with the triumphant Marquis di Pallavinci.

"Poor devil!" he sighed. "Montaverde will recover, but he is out of the pale, now! I've no doubt that Clark paid hard for his dirty work, for, I learned to-day from the proprietor, that Clark—the dead Maspero,—and this poor fool Montaverde, used to have frequent nightly conclaves at the Quirinale!"

The most startled woman in Rome was Mrs. Mary Atwater when, after an evening of triumphal celebration, her husband called her aside.

"Landon and I are going to run over to Paris for four days!

"You are impounded in the care of Mrs. Hollingsworth, and, no one is to know of our absence! Charley Hollingsworth will be your cicerone, and, so—leave all to him!"

Mary Atwater's eyes filled with tears as she threw her arms around her husband.

"Dear little woman!" he fondly said, as he gave her a bear's hug. *"Don't fret!* This trip gives Landon back to his regiment! I shall telegraph to Hatcher to have the President appoint him, *at once!"*

And, so, Mary Atwater smiled through her tears as Colonel Atwater and Landon stole away

at half past eleven with Hollingsworth and Morgan.

"I'll send you all the news to Meurice's," said Morgan.

"The sensation is growing hourly, and Minister Hartford has been all afternoon at the Consulate General, directing the inquisition into Maspero's misdeeds!

"He has transferred all the Legation and Consular deposits, and will have every governmental account experted. I find that all the special deposits were made in Consul General Melville's name, and these sly Italians must make good everything withdrawn by Maspero.

"And, so,—we are getting on famously. I am getting from Lucia and Paolo the whole details of Clark's villainy in using Maspero as a tool to ruin Captain Landon as Vice Consul General."

Colonel Atwater gazed anxiously at Landon's stern set face as the train rushed along to Mont Cenis. The young soldier seemed to urge the carriage forward with every movement of his lithe, impatient body.

It was on the evening of the second day that the two men stepped out of the fiacre at Meurice's

Hotel, and then, for the first time,—Sidney Landon spoke of their quest!

He personally dropped a letter into the official box at the Hotel, addressed to Mrs. Gertrude Melville, Grand Hotel, London, and, then sent a carefully registered pacquet to the same address.

The two men gazed expectantly at each other in the silence of Landon's room!

"*Let us lose no time,*" hoarsely said the young lover. "*He may get away!* I would follow him to Khamschatka rather than lose him now! Here is my will, and a few directions!

"Just go down and put these in the Hotel safe, and have Haddon call a covered carriage."

The old Colonel's face was as grim as when he led his men into the hell of Spottsylvania, in the bitter years when all the leaves of the Wilderness were red with hearts' blood.

Landon started up at his return!

"What's your plan, Sidney?" asked the resolute old veteran.

"Haddon will find, if he is in the Hotel Athenèe! If he is, *we will see him at once.*

"If not, we can await his return in the courtyard; no one knows us there!

"I've given Jack Haddon, Clark's picture. I got it at the photographer's in Rome! He will mark our man down."

"And then?" queried Atwater.

"I want you to let him know who you are! *I will do the rest!* I only wish you as a witness!"

"For God's sake! Sidney! Do nothing rashly!" murmured the old Colonel. *"Is this fellow worth it?"*

"Let us go!" wearily replied Landon. "I cannot wait another moment!"

There was a silence in the carriage as the two friends drove down into the Rue Scribe, and, at the Grand Hotel corner, the carriage awaited the return of Jack Haddon, who was an ordinary tourist in appearance, in plain clothes.

It seemed an age, that fifteen minutes, till the agile Briton returned.

" 'E's in the private card room, a-talkin' with a couple of fellows! 'E can't get away. It opens out of the billiard room!"

"Very good," sternly said the master. "You take the carriage up to the entrance of the court! You are to show us the billiard room quietly, and, then wait in the carriage, in the court!"

Five minutes later, the flaneurs in the billiard hall of the Grand Hotel de l'Athenèe languidly raised their heads as Colonel Atwater marched stolidly along to the card room, followed by Landon, stepping with a panther's springy tread. His eyes were fixed and staring as he walked along to meet his mortal enemy.

There were three men sitting in the little room at a card table, whereon the glasses told of a convivial function.

Rawdon Clark, haggard and fierce-eyed,—sprang up as Landon quietly closed the door.

Atwater started at the icy coldness of Sidney Landon's voice.

"I have come a thousand miles to see you," he said, fixing his blazing eyes upon his enemy.

"This is Colonel Atwater, Commander of the Grays! *You know the Regiment well!* We have some business with you!

"If you wish one of your friends to remain as a witness, *all right."*

"We don't propose to move," cried the two raffish looking fellows, in a truculent chorus.

"All the same, then," coolly replied Landon. "First, let me tell you," he sharply said to Clark,

"STIR NOT, ON YOUR LIVES!"—*Page 362.*

"your tool, spy and mail thief—Signore Jacopo Maspero, lies in the police dead house, at Rome, killed by the woman you paid to betray Melville!"

Clark sprang back and made a motion!

"*Don't drop that hand, sir!*" harshly cried Colonel Atwater, whose left hand was in his coat pocket!

There was an ominous silence as the watchful Atwater moved closer up to Clark.

"*You shall listen, sir!*" he thundered. "I want you to know," said Landon, with increasing scorn, "that Maspero has confessed all, and turned over to me the proofs of your unutterable villainy!"

Clark glared around the circle!

"Northam and Witherspoon," he cried, "I want you to bear witness to this pack of damned lies!"

Ignoring the millionaire's retort, Landon pitilessly resumed:

"I recovered from him the letters which you paid him to steal,—the originals,—which you could not buy!"

Clark grew white with rage, as Atwater's deep voice broke in:

"And I forced from Mrs. Myra Brandon your dirty farrago of lies,—obtained through Wilmot and Bolton! There's one letter that will make 'Black Bill' hunt you over the world! *I have all these originals!*"

Clark was cornered like a rat! His livid eyes roved from Atwater to Landon.

He caught a gleam of encouragement from his raffish guests, who were deceived by Atwater's grave sobriety of dress, and Landon's still restrained patience.

"*And so,* you've come all the way here to bully me about the girl you disgraced,—and, Melville's light-heeled wife."

There was the sound of a crash as Clark went down before Sidney Landon's impetuous onslaught! But, accustomed to bar-room brawls, the defeated scoundrel had leaped back!

He rose with a bound,—his murderous eyes showing the glee of taking the last trick! There was the lightning flash of the one idea possessing him!

To cheat Fate by robbing Agnes Hawthorn of the man whom she loved!

His hand shot out,—there was the gleam of

silver steel and the triple click of a pistol lock,—but only a howl of pain succeeded that ominous warning.

Miles Atwater had grasped the right hand of the detected villain!

With one mighty effort, he bent the wrist back, till the bones snapped, and Rawdon Clark, unmasked and defeated, dropped into a chair!

"*Stir not, on your lives!*" cried Landon, as he covered Witherspoon and Northam with his pistol.

"*Hear me, you lying dog!*" mercilessly added the young soldier. "You abused the woman whom you pretended to love, with the foulest suggestions! You wrote that anonymous letter to Melville, for which he will cut your back to tatters! *You are helpless now,*—but, for the wrong you have done,—I will shoot you like a rat if you ever cross my path again. Remember this, you murderous brute! The letter you tricked out of a foolish woman, goes to her husband! *He will dog you down like a wolf!*"

"Take notice from me," broke in Atwater's growling bass voice. "Prindle is out of the regi-

ment! I shall certify to every one in Rome the impossibility of your dirty lies about Landon!

"And, by God, your life will pay the penalty if you abuse my regiment or an officer in it! *Find some corner of the world to hide yourself!* I have prevented Landon from killing you like a coyote!"

The two men strode out without a glance at the crestfallen schemer! But, the philosophic Atwater had coolly picked up Clark's pistol and quietly pocketed it!

The next day—the Honorable Rawdon Clark had vanished from Paris, and Colonel Atwater was homeward bound to Rome.

Over in dingy London, a loving woman was hiding in her snowy bosom a letter which said:

"I send her letter. Give it to her. Tell her that I never received it! It was given over by the dying thief who stole it! I only wait now for the voice of the past!

"Then, when Agnes Hawthorn has listened to it, she will know why I could only speak to her alone! For, of all women on earth, *she alone has the right to know!*"

CHAPTER XV.

CALLED BACK.

While Sidney Landon recovered his shaken composure at the Hotel Meuricè, Colonel Miles Atwater stole away and sent an imperative cablegram to Major General Rufus Hatcher, Army and Navy Club, Washington, D. C.

He, then, having dispatched the agile Haddon to take his through place to Rome, via Mont Cenis, spent the most of his leisure before train time in the inditing of a carefully written dispatch to General Hatcher:

"We've got the boy sure, now, Rufus," he gladly wrote, *"and,—I think, also,—a valuable recruit for the Grays.* Go ahead and get the appointment. Cable me, care Consulate General, Rome! I am going to stay here and see the thing through!"

The two army friends passed a solemn half hour before Haddon reported the carriage ready. The brisk valet had found time to dart over to the Athenèe.

"This 'ere millionaire chap has cut his stick!

That's flat," was the report which quieted Atwater's apprehensions!

"He is done for," quietly said Landon. "Your character and presence as Commander of the Grays kills his dirty gossip, and,—he believes me. —I think,—in my liberal proposition, to shoot him at sight!

"But, Miles, he will have no chance! I beg you to say nothing of my whereabouts. I shall just have time to catch the steamer at Chesbourg! I'll run direct over to St. Louis. I'll execute the necessary legal papers, see to the disposition of the estate, and, then,—notify my lawyers that I shall send Edwin Morgan over there to take charge as my agent!"

"And, then?" anxiously demanded Miles Atwater.

"I shall come back to Rome, give Morgan his instructions, definitely resign the Egyptian service, and,—probably buy a yacht, and,—*sail around the world!*"

"That's some of Wainwright's binnacle nonsense, my boy," cried the old Colonel, affectionately putting his hand on Landon's shoulder.

"Don't you know you're the only son I have!

Promise me that you'll do nothing till you see me!"

"How could I, you dear old grizzly bear?" fondly replied the younger soldier. *"There's my hand on it!* I promise! Don't you see that I've got to come back for Morgan?"

"Morgan be—blowed!" roared Miles, with an effort at restraint.

"You'll come back to thank Mary Atwater for patching you up when the Sioux left their little marks upon your anatomy, for riding too far ahead of your squadron!"

"Anyway," laughed Landon. "Love to them that are at Rome, also!"

But, there was no dissembling when the train pulled out!

"'E's a regular out-an'-outer, is Colonel Atwater!" ventured Haddon. "Salt of the earth, sir! D'ye know, 'e went himself an' got Colonel Stanton to telegraph to London to the Horse Guards for my full pardon,—an', *it's on the way,* so I needn't hide now from Her Brittanic Majesty's stray Sergeant Majors!"

Landon spent his last three hours in Paris in "literary exercises." They were vain attempts to

produce a satisfactory letter to be read by Miss Agnes Hawthorn, Grand Hotel, London.

After tearing up some twenty,—the young cavalryman at last dispatched the briefest one.

Its announcement that he was going upon a secret business visit of a month to America was followed by the simple statement that he would return to Rome to close up his affairs.

"I shall come back to Europe, *if only to see you.* Think all the past over, and remember that I have only asked for your faith in my honor! You will receive from me, on my return, the story of which even the Atwaters have been ignorant! I can say to you that there will be no one in Rome to annoy you,—for the one who insulted *you* and maligned *me,* has disappeared, never to return.

"Colonel Atwater can explain to you *why!* Suffice it to say, that he has been detected and betrayed by his spy Maspero on his wretched deathbed."

Sidney Landon had reached New York on the fleet "Ville de Paris," before Colonel Miles Atwater's letter from Rome fully enlightened Arthur Melville as to the occurrences in Paris.

It was only after perusing Mrs. Mary Atwater's private epistle, that the heiress and her "other soul" felt free to return to the banks of

the Seine,—for the completion of that magnificent wardrobe, in which dazzling war paint, Miss Hawthorn was to be presented at Her Majesty's First Drawing Room.

A fortnight in Paris exhausted Arthur Melville's leave, and Miss Hawthorn, under escort of the wife of the First Secretary of our English Legation, departed again for London, with that serene self consciousness which Worth and Pingât, alone, can give!

"Far above rubies" is woman's confidence in correct gowns,—and,—Agnes Hawthorn, now subject to certain varying palpitations of the heart, was, all in all, a fond and loving woman.

In all her letters from the Atwaters,—in all her daily life with the Melvilles, the name of Sidney Landon was artfully tabooed,—it was avoided as gracefully as the ocean greyhound swerves away from the ominous iceberg.

And, yet, withal, a cheerful patience seemed to possess even Forrest Grimes, who had chivalrously acted as "Big Brother" and Emeritus valet de place,—both in London and Paris.

He had taken a run over to Paris to say "Goodbye" to honest Frank Hatton, who had been sum-

moned home to Philadelphia to take the responsible promotion of Assistant Editor-in-Chief of the Philadelphia Mail.

It was only after telegraphing Colonel Atwater, in urgent terms, that Hatton received Sidney Landon's American address.

And, Grimes, as well as Atwater, now knew that Rawdon Clark had suddenly sold, to an unknown buyer,—his overshadowing interest in the Philadelphia Mail.

"*Flail no longer,—thank God,*" said Frank Hatton, as the two men conferred over Colonel Atwater's letter, telling them of Rawdon Clark's miserable villainy, and the open disgrace of the Paris fracas!

"*He's off for Timbuctoo or Kalamazoo!*" cheerfully remarked Grimes.

"I fancy the dog has had his day!"

And, when Grimes put Hatton on the "Pomerania," at Havre, he knew that Sidney Landon, on his way back, had agreed to meet Hatton for one day in Philadelphia.

"It looks as if the clouds had rolled around at last,—Frank," mused the overjoyed Grimes. "And,—the silver lining begins to flash out! I

wonder if we shall ever meet again in the Eveless Paradise! *Who knows!"*

"Not as we were," sighed Hatton. "We will find Sidney Landon a deserter, for I believe in his next Paradise,—Mademoiselle Eve will be very much 'en èvidence.' "

"And, as for me," he demurely confessed, "I have a little woman in Philadelphia who has already written to me that five thousand a year is enough *'for two!'* "

"Go to! *Go to!"* gaily cried Grimes. "They go, the festive cusses go! Remember! I'm not chary of my silverware!

"And—so, I will be left to dance in the silk stockings and play Pontifex Maximus to the light-headed and light-hearted boys of the Eveless Paradise."

As the great steamer swung around, Frank Hatton, going home to a richer life and a waiting love, never thought, as he waved his farewells, that the stern self reliant man, left alone on the cheerless granite quay, was breathing a prayer for the loved and lost in fond memories "of one remembered sunny head," which had so long been

lying low, pillowed in death under the whispering grasses of the Golden State!

It was seven weeks from the day of Colonel Atwater's farewell to Sidney Landon, when the Melvilles, the Hollingsworths and Mrs. Miles Atwater were gathered at the railway station in Rome, in answer to an adroitly prearranged telegram of the alert Jack Haddon.

Sidney Landon's face flushed as he stepped from the train, and was enfolded in the vigorous bear hug of the delighted old veteran!

"*You rascal,*" cried Landon, as his man darted out, to rescue the luggage from the uniformed Italian banditti of the railway!

"*This is your work!*"

"Never mind *whose* work it is!" cried Colonel Atwater! "You will see all my guests at the Hotel de Russie!"

And, much stir was there in Rome over the triumphal procession of three carriages, while valet Haddon hid his diminished head, and yet was overjoyed at the envelope which Colonel Atwater thrust into his hand!

Her Majesty's formal pardon was accentuated by a crisp £10 note!

A bit of moisture dimmed the merry scapegrace's eyes as he murmured:

"God bless the dear old buffer! An' he hasn't got such a lot of them there engravings to throw away!"

Mrs. Mary Atwater, for once in her life, proved herself a true daughter of Eve as she triumphantly sat alone with the returning wanderer!

With artful carelessness, Landon listened, in the long drive,—to news of every one, including the wretched aftermath of Maspero's crimes and the crucial official examination of the Consulate General's affairs!

One person only was forgotten, and,—that charming person, strangely, was Miss Agnes Hawthorn!

Landon was nervously restless, while his gentle tormentor mused:

"My dear wayward boy, you would ride unanswered to the Alps with me! No information shall be volunteered as to the golden-haired goddess! Love must find out its own way!"

And, Landon gazed out upon dingy Rome and held his peace, for he could hear the tell-tale beating of his heart.

The sudden ushering of Landon into a banquet hall, decorated with the beloved colors of his country, and graced with the gallant guidons of the "Grays," in which, "K" troop's battle-stained silken banner held the proudest place, unmanned the young soldier.

He sat at the right of the steadfast Mary Atwater, when the old Colonel called the guests to order!

"*This is a strictly military assemblage,*" the veteran said, "and, *so,* I claim obedience from all! I am both the *oldest* and the *ugliest!*"

With a ringing voice, he read an official order of the War Department, reciting the appointment of Sidney Landon, late Captain—U. S. Cavalry, to be Major in a certain distinguished staff corps.

The surprised young visitor sprang to his feet, in astonishment, only to drop, overcome, in his chair, when Mrs. Atwater handed him a sealed official envelope.

It contained his transfer as Major from the staff—to his old Regiment.

"*March up, now, sir,*" whispered the army wife, through her happy tears, "and, *salute your Colonel!*"

Landon mused as in a dream, until he faced the grizzled old warrior, who muttered:

"It was the only way we could find to rake you in, my boy, and, so—prevent you becoming a nautical globe trotter,—if that's not an Irish bull!

"See that you swear in to-morrow, and cable your acceptance to the War Department! You've got two months' leave, and, we will take you along with us!"

Somebody's eyes were very dim as a hidden orchestra broke out in the old Regimental march, which had been Landon's lullaby as he laid long years before, maimed with the Sioux bullets!

The dinner was positively a riotous one, and, yet, neither Gertrude Melville nor Elaine Hollingsworth could catch the newly made Major's wandering eye!

The man who feared nothing,—had become strangely timid.

It was only when Edwin Morgan entered, as if by chance, with a huge packet of mail, that Landon became alert and uneasy!

Rapidly scanning the accumulated pile, he grew

pale as he noted one, which, covered with stamps, bore the postmarks of California's metropolis.

The ladies had retired under the artful guidance of Mrs. Atwater, when the Colonel led Landon aside into a little alcove!

"Sidney, my boy," he said, as his voice trembled. "Read this cable from General Hatcher. —and, bless God for such a friend! Now, in all your triumphs of the hour, I ask but one favor. I wish you to give me those two letters of poor Dora Prindle's.

"Here's a letter from 'Black Bill.' He writes me from his modest country home, for, he is now retired for life on two-thirds pay. I'll read it,—all that you should know." The words touched Landon's heart:

"Atwater,—I have tried for four years to find out who was hounding down Captain Landon, with the anonymous letters and accusations which have been the regimental mystery! I always admired Landon as a soldier! He will tell you so, and—you know it! I was always kind to him, since the days when he joined us, a rosy graduated cadet! And, by God, poor as I am, if I can serve him, or clear his honor, I'll come over the ocean to tell any one living,—that Landon's whole life with the Regiment was *without a stain!*

"The Grays had twenty years of the best of my

life,—they're sadly changed now,—our dead lie scattered in five new states. Landon has been worried out of the army,—poor Murray Raynor is the last to fall under the Indian rifle, and,—*my day is done!*

"I'll never jump at the sound of 'Boots and Saddles' again! But, tell Landon that I'll cross the sea to unearth the liars who vilified him, and that's all old 'Black Bill' can do!"

Landon's head was bowed upon his hands.

"It has been the sacrifice of a life! *Poor old man!* Colonel! I have all the proofs here!" He tapped his breast! "And, when one person has seen them, I'll then give you Dora Prindle's letters to destroy! Poor, brave old 'Black Bill,' must never know of his wife's disgrace."

The Colonel, with "one person" in his mind, raised a joyous shout!

When all the rest came trooping in, the veteran filled Landon's glass to overflowing.

"*Let us drink to the absent,*" he cried, and Major Sidney Landon's glass trembled as the hidden orchestra played softly, "*Some day, you'll call me back again!*"

There was no danger of a sentimental revulsion, for, for the first time since his graduation, Colonel Miles Atwater deliberately began to sing,

"Benny Havens, oh!" a performance of such unusual musical merit that the sweet-voiced women all joined in and drowned the old soldier's leonine roar in a flood of soaring melody.

It was Morgan who handed Colonel Atwater a cablegram just brought up by the host, in propria personæ.

This voluble Boniface had mentally decided that all the Americans were crazy,—but,—good paymasters, and, so—unsuspecting sheep to be closely sheared.

"There you are,—vale Rawdon Clark!" muttered Atwater, as he handed Major Landon the telegram.

It brought the blood leaping, flame-like, into Landon's cheeks. It was from Frank Hatton at Philadelphia.

"United States Court has decided against Clark. Elkhorn Mine found to be on opposing company's ground. Order out for Clark's arrest. The surveyors have all turned State's evidence and confessed. Clark is a bankrupt and fugitive. He sailed for South America a week ago, with the woman who was his go-between in the crime. Full particulars in Associated Press."

Major Landon drew Morgan aside.

"I shall need you all day to-morrow," he said. "I will borrow you from Melville."

And then he timidly drew near to Gertrude Melville.

He led that radiant young matron aside, and explained to her his desire to convey "a certain letter of great importance" *to a certain person in London!*

"I wish your advice," he said. "I could not risk losing it! *My honor depends upon it!* And —you know,—you can guess why that I can not go and deliver it, *myself!*"

The gentle dissembler at his side dropped her eyes in a sudden confusion.

"Don't go,—Sidney—don't send!" she shamefacedly said.

"That person will arrive here, as my guest in three days! You know that all roads lead to Rome!"

Major Landon raised her two little white hands and kissed them fondly.

"You are not an angel," he said, *"only* the next thing to one,—*the dearest woman in the world!"*

"Except one," remarked Gertrude Melville, as she evaded further colloquy. "Come to me to-

morrow at eleven! *Give it to me then.* And—she shall receive it at my hands."

When the happy party broke up, Major Landon had learned of the sudden departure of the Brandons for Venice!

The social atmosphere had been murky around the Art Exchange, and the greens, reds and yellows now glared upon the walls of an old palazzo on the Canal Grande!

Some invisible spirit led the excited Landon out of the hotel in the silence of the night to commune with himself! He wandered on and on, until, with a start, he paused, as the plashing waters of the Fountain of Trevi recalled him!

The great, white, silent stars were gleaming down on the shimmering pool as the lonely man tossed a coin into the darkening waters!

It flashed yellow in the moonlight!

"I wonder if gold will break the charm," he murmured; "for, I have gold now!

"The unearned increment,—the concrete force of the world,—the lever of power,—the minister of pleasure!"

And many old dreams he dreamed over as he slowly retraced his steps.

There was a sensation at the Consulate General the next day, when it was vaguely noised about that Mr. Edwin Morgan, Deputy Vice Consul General, had abruptly resigned his post and would leave at once for America.

"A result of the office scandals," cried all the loungers at the American Club, but, only Atwater, —Melville—and the suddenly enriched Major, knew that, to use the vernacular—Edwin Morgan had "dropped into a good thing."

Major Landon deliberately "sported the oak" for three long days,—though his table was deeply covered with cards and invitations!

The pendulum of social favor had swung once more, and the most romantic tales of his adventures en Pasha floated from club to drawing-room and all over Rome!

He did not even approach the Palazzo Vecchio, where he certainly had a free field, for Arthur Melville, was now an extremist in the official supervision of his office!

The "painting light" allured him in vain!

But, Major Landon was seen on the Corso,—in the Borghese Gardens,—on the Pincian,—at the opera and theater—under the gracefully in-

nocuous escort of Mrs. Atwater and that dashing matron,—Mrs. Elaine Hollingsworth.

When besieged by the gossips, Charley Hollingsworth only "winked the other eye," and said nothing.

The Princess Branciforte was in town—and,—moreover,—he was the escort of Mrs. Melville, and that returned Queen of Beauty, Miss Agnes Hawthorn, who was, however, a mere "bird of passage," en route for her beloved Vienna.

But, behind the flimsy drapery of this social masking, there was an undercurrent like the solemn Greek chorus of old.

Agnes Hawthorn, alone, in Gertrude Melville's shaded boudior, feared to look at her own blushing face in the great pier glass, as she read the letter addressed to her by the widowed mother of Ethel Raynor.

The very address, "My dear child," had touched her heart! General Hartwell's relict had neither kith nor kin, since her only daughter, Ethel Raynor, had laid down her tired head to rest under the violets of San Rafael.

"I can tell you,—my dear child," she wrote, "of the cruel work a wicked woman's bitter-

hearted gossip. It was this heartless meddling which darkened two lives.

"General Hartwell took me to visit West Point, after the war, when my only child, Ethel, was seventeen.

"Young Landon was a gallant boy, the Cadet Adjutant,—the pride of his class, and soon,—in the chivalric way of the dear old Alma Mater, he became romantically attached to Ethel!

"Graduating hop, parades, and flirtation walks found them together! I little dreamed of the growing devotion of the young soldier,—and the awakening of a girlish love in my dear child's heart, then, unfolding like a flower!

"But, General Hartwell was both keen-eyed and sternly ambitious!

"He whisked us away over to Europe! In three years, Ethel grew into womanhood. She had forgotten the impulsive young cadet sweetheart, save only to remember him as a graceful friend of those girlish days.

"Landon was graduated and, away, winning his spurs on the frontier!

"My husband was a masterful man! It was in accordance with his ambition and love of pros-

pective rank that Ethel married Major Murray Raynor,—who was rich, gallant and respected.

"He was congenial, of a fine family, and, with an especially fortunate future as to promotion.

"Alas! After the marriage, that promotion to the Major carried him into the Grays!

"And,—then, some fiend in human form, who knew of Landon's cadet life, found a means of mean revenge.

"Gossip, bitter stories, anonymous letters, ——— tales, and every veiled method of attack drove Murray Raynor nearly crazy.

"My child withered under the brutal persecution.

"I feared even a collision between the men, for Captain Landon's grave, distant courtesy was held to be a covert means of hiding an intrigue disgraceful to the regiment.

"Major Raynor sent his wife home to me to escape these slanders. The old cadet-time was painted in lurid colors. No one could prove who the author was,—though many suspected some regimental rivalry to be the cause.

"Alas! Captain Landon was ordered out here on recruiting duty, and—in the Major's absence.

"The anonymous letters and army gossip became even more bitter! It was only after my husband's death! I brought the two men together in my presence.

"They, God bless them, understood all the honorable memories of the past!

"With a manly gallantry, Captain Landon transferred to another regiment! *It was too late!* My darling Ethel sickened under the vulgar abuse which continued. Her name was soiled—her gentle heart broken.

"Landon's transfer was now held up as a flight, —forced by fear of discovery and of Murray Raynor's revenge!

"When my poor darling died, Major Raynor was away on the Terry campaign in the Yellowstone.

"And,—sad at heart,—I learned from a friend on the Rio Grande that Captain Landon abruptly left the army, shocked by the needless tragedy of my dear child's death!

"Had Major Raynor been with us, when we laid the light of my life away, he would have led Landon to his wife's grave as a brother, mourning with him!

"And, then, after Landon's abrupt resignation, —the stories still pursued him!

"They made Major Raynor a heart-broken misanthrope! He madly threw his lonely life away in desperate foolhardy valor, in the Nez Perce fight!

"And, now, when you read this, know what woman's inhumanity to woman can be! God alone knows whose wicked heart pursued these three unhappy people. I never visited the regiment, and—so am ignorant of any cause.

"I go soon to my darling. I shall pray God to bless Landon for the delicate manliness which led him to give up his own cherished Regiment to remove even the suspicion of nearness to the dear woman for whom he had cherished only the ardent school-boy fancy of a West Point cadet! The blow was directed at *him,* I know, for the lies and scandal have followed him *out* of the army, and—long after Ethel Raynor had been wrapped in God's own rest and peace! And, when I know that Captain Landon has been hounded into other lands by this undying malignity,—that these merciless lies have shaded your fair young life,—this knowledge, *alone,* makes me write you,

—that your young heart be troubled not! May God grant that I meet you, together, before I leave this weary world, and to know that, over my daughter's grave, I can proudly tell you Sidney Landon has been a mirror of chivalry,—a pilgrim of honor and a silent sufferer, rather than shade a woman's name by openly revenging wrongs that could be traced to no *man's* hand.

"I fear that I do know whose hand dealt the blow,—in sheer envy of Ethel, and, may God forgive her!"

Gertrude Melville wondered not, when the orphaned heiress threw her arms around her, and cried:

"*I must see him!* And, I owe my life to him! I have made him so wretched! Listen, Gertrude!"

She read one sentence.

"Here is what *Ethel Raynor s mother* writes to me:

"The dead Ethel Raynor's widowed mother shall make clear Sidney Landon's honor to you, —for the sake of the beloved child, now taken away from me,—who only knew him in the gentle glamour of a girlish fancy,—the woman whom

he chivalrously protected,—with a useless devotion, which has cast him out of the army!"

"I have ruined Sidney Landon's happiness," cried the golden-haired orphan.

"*Do the best you can to repair the wrong!*" demurely answered the lovely matron.

"*Will you* trust to me! I know *now,* from Mrs. Atwater, that he fears your wealth no more!"

And, then, Agnes Hawthorn, in crimson blushes, bowed her head, and fled away to read, once more,—Sidney Landon's letter:

"You, *alone,* of all women in the world have the right to know the whole truth."

It was on the following evening that Gertrude Melville enticed her pensive guest into her carriage for a drive under the silvery light of the pale moon, looking down upon the stern old hills where countless human tragedies have hallowed the still enchanted ground.

Agnes Hawthorn was silent! She cared not whither her hostess was leading her, and, neither spoke until the carriage halted before the gateway of the church of San Sebastian.

There was a tall form waiting there, and, silently, the trembling girl took the stranger's

arm, for a voice which had been echoing in her heart for months softly said:

"Let us listen, once more, to the song of the waters!"

They stood alone, there together, by the brimming basin, filled with its floating stars, for Mrs. Gertrude Melville had strangely vanished!

Sidney Landon, turning his head, fancied that he saw the martial figure of his beloved Colonel, hidden there in the somber shade of the wall's deepest angle.

Major Landon took the hand of the silent woman, and kissed it with a fervor which belied his calmness.

"Agnes," he softly said. "I carried your violets on my heart, in all the mad rush of that wild massacre of Gura!

"I sent back to you the letter which never reached me, the letter which the dying thief returned to me,—through Melville,—only when the terrors of the Church assailed him, upon his death bed!

"I have not yet read the letter which you destined as an answer to my heart's one prayer! And, *here,*—now,—*beside the faithful fountain*

dear to lovers, I ask you to tell me of that letter!"

The beautiful woman smiled up at him, through her happy tears!

"You *alone,* of all the world, Sidney," she said, in a voice soft as the falling dews of night,—"you *alone*—had the right to that knowledge! I told you, Sidney,—*to come,—to come to me, here,—at Rome,*—that I would believe your simple word against the whole world"—her voice faltered, as she placed both her slender hands in his ardent grasp,—*"and,—now, I bid you, stay!"*

"There was but one barrier built by pride, my own darling," the soldier whispered; "but a juggling Fate has sent me riches unasked! And, now, as I go back under the silken banners to bear the honorable burden of a soldier's life,—I ask you, *will you be my wife?"*

The noble beauty of the orphan's face thrilled him, as she proudly said:

"Wherever the road leads, we will walk, please God,—*side by side*—and—bear the burden of life together. *I demand the right to atone!"*

In some strange way, they found themselves, with Colonel Atwater and Mrs. Gertrude Mel-

ville gazing upon the two, who seemed glorified in that mystic fairy moonlight!

"*If I mistake not,*" tenderly said the veteran, as he laid his fatherly hand upon the fair woman's stately head, "the Grays have gained a new recruit,—and—one who needs a world of Regimental training!"

And, the old Colonel opened his arms, for Agnes laid her head upon his bosom.

"*It is time to go down and report at Head Quarters,*" the Colonel dryly remarked.

"And, I give you my first and only order! See that it be not long until you are sworn into 'Ours!'"

And, the spirit of the singing waters blessed them as they went away.

THE END.